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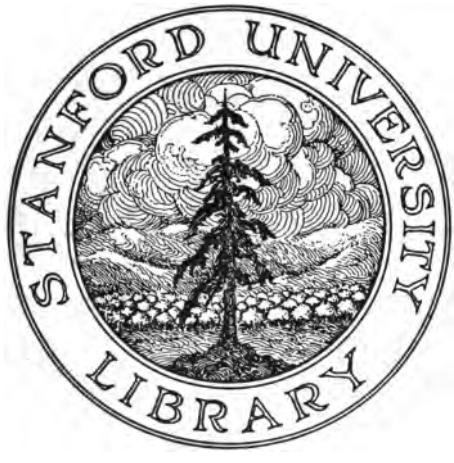
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TACITUS

AND OTHER ROMAN STUDIES

BY

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PREFACE

THE Romans had a very just appreciation of the merit of their historians. Quintilian, in his rapid survey of the writers of his country, asserts that there are three literary forms in which they bear comparison with those of Greece. 'Satire,' he says, 'is wholly ours. . . . In the elegy we are their rivals. . . . Our historians take no lower place than theirs.'[1]

Let us note that when Quintilian thus expressed himself he was unacquainted with the works of Tacitus, that is to say of the greatest man among them. In his time it was a question for dispute whether Sallust or Livy were pre-eminent. The classicists preferred Livy, who delighted them by the pure and abundant flow of his eloquence. The new school was fascinated by the vigorous strokes and the profundity of Sallust, and Martial, who liked to embody in well-turned verses the opinions of his time, had no hesitation in saying:

Crispus romana primus in historia.

To-day we rank Tacitus above the two others; he even enjoys the privilege, in the decline of classical studies, of preserving all his popularity. Not only is he read still, though the ancient authors have scarce any longer readers, but to speak of him is almost a claim to be read. I have no pretension in these few pages to exhaust all that could

[1] *Satira tota nostra est . . . elegia Græcos provocamus . . . non historia cesserit Græcis . . . Inst. orat.*, x. 1.

be said of him. I shall emphasise certain questions which might have been much discussed, both in Germany and amongst ourselves, with respect to the manner in which he conceived of history and on his way of judging events and men.

I crave permission to add to this work on Tacitus some studies published on various occasions, which may serve for its elucidation.

CONTENTS

TACITUS—

PAGE

CHAP. I. HOW TACITUS BECAME A HISTORIAN, . . . 1

II. THE CONCEPTION OF HISTORY IN TACITUS, . . 43

III. THE JUDGMENT OF TACITUS ON THE CÆSARS, . . 87

IV. THE POLITICAL OPINIONS OF TACITUS, . . . 122

THE SCHOOLS OF DECLAMATION AT ROME, . . 163

THE ROMAN JOURNAL, ... 195

THE POET MARTIAL, ... 233

TACITUS

CHAPTER I

HOW TACITUS BECAME A HISTORIAN

THE Life of Tacitus presents the peculiarity, somewhat rare among great writers, that he was late in undertaking the branch of literature in which he was to win distinction. For long he was but an orator and politician; he was close on forty-five,[1] he had just been consul, when he published his first historical books. This tardy commencement was not without causing him some disquietude, since in entering upon the *Agricola* he believes himself bound to apologise for his inexperience; he seems afraid that his voice may appear harsh and uncouth.[2] I do not think, however, that the public which read the work on its publication can have perceived that the author had any need of indulgence. Does this imply that he suddenly blossomed forth as a historian? Such abrupt vocations are rare, and it were better to believe that, without being directly prepared for the part, he was ready to assume it, thanks to his former studies and the very conditions in which he had lived. To understand how this came to pass,

[1] We are ignorant of the exact date of the birth of Tacitus; but since we know at what age public functions were usually entered upon, and the epoch at which he reached them is also known, we can be almost certain that he was born between 54 and 56 A.D., that is to say in the earliest years of Nero's principate. Chateaubriand, in the resounding article which caused the suppression of the *Mercure*, derived some fine phrases from this convergence in time of Nero and Tacitus. 'When in the silence of subjection nought is to be heard save the clanking chain of the slave and the voice of the informer, when all tremble before the tyrant, and it is as perilous to fall under his favour as to deserve his disgrace, the historian appears, invested with the vengeance of the peoples. 'Tis in vain that Nero flourishes; Tacitus is already born in the Empire. He is growing up, unknown, hard by the ashes of Germanicus, and already just Providence has delivered over to an obscure child the glory of the master of the world.'

[2] *Agric.* 3: *incondita ac rudi voce.*

and from whence proceeded that obscure preparation which in him developed an unselfconscious talent, it would be necessary to revert to his earliest years. Unfortunately they are very little known; Tacitus is one of the few writers who do not care to entertain the reader with their own personality. This reticence does him much honour, but it is a disadvantage to those who study his life. To know anything of it at all we are reduced to the very rare confidences which escape him, and to some details coming from his friends.

I

What is known of the family of Tacitus. His education. The *Dialogue of the Orators*. At what period it was written and published. Which interlocutor expresses the ideas of Tacitus in the *Dialogue*? His opinion on the method of teaching eloquence. The importance and character of the digressions in Tacitus.

A chance allusion informs us in what surroundings he was born. The elder Pliny, amongst the anecdotes which he scattered through his *Natural History*, has occasion to mention the name of a Roman knight, his contemporary, who was called Cornelius Tacitus and administered the revenues of Belgic Gaul.[1] This must have been the father or uncle of our historian, and we thus learn that he sprang from one of those families of knights, holding financial posts, in which fortunes were made. It is not then quite correct to maintain, as is usually done when there is a desire to cast some discredit on his impartiality, that he was well disposed to great lords, since he belonged to their caste and, in espousing their interests, defended his own cause. He was, as they said at Rome, 'a new man,' which signified that none of his family had as yet entered the Senate. It is probable that his father, who had, what the equestrian functions generally gave, position and wealth, desired that his son should rise higher and be able to aspire to the curule dignities. He had to obtain for him the Emperor's grant of the laticlave—that is to say the right

[1] Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* vii. 16, 76.

of wearing the white tunic edged by a broad purple stripe; it was the usual fashion of initiating a young man into the ranks of those for whom public honours were reserved. He was thus marked out in advance for the quæstorship, and later, if fortune smiled on him, he might attain the consulate.

To reach such high destinies it was in the first place essential that the young man should receive a very careful education. Tacitus no doubt learned what in his time was taught, and, as the art of speech was that which a politician could least afford to neglect, he must have studied rhetoric. At that period it was professed with great distinction by Quintilian, for whom the Emperor had just founded the first public chair of eloquence created at Rome. It has naturally been asked whether Tacitus did not attend his lessons, as later did his friend the younger Pliny. It is likely enough, but cannot be positively asserted. We shall see that, if on certain sides Tacitus approximates to Quintilian, on many others he diverges. Supposing he were his pupil, he must have been a singularly independent pupil, and one who did not plume himself on invariably approving his master's ideas.

On this point we are no longer arguing from hypotheses; we have a work of Tacitus, the earliest he wrote, which retains as it were a reflection of his education. It is the *Dialogue of the Orators*, a little book of a few pages, which is assuredly one of the finest critical treatises which antiquity has bequeathed to us. This treatise has been the subject of great controversies, and some of the problems it suggests are still unsolved. Although often doubted, it is assuredly the work of Tacitus, and hardly any one nowadays contests its authenticity; but there is less unanimity as to the date at which it was written and published. The conversation which Tacitus reports takes place in the fifth year of the 'reign[1] of Vespasian, and he tells us he was then 'quite young';

[1] I crave leave to make use of the word 'reign,' even although it be not quite proper, and an Emperor be not a king. But the word is convenient, and amongst ourselves much employed to denote the period during which a prince has been possessed of the sovereign power.

which shows that between the period when he was present and that at which he wrote, some years had elapsed, and the young man had had time to grow to maturity. Supposing an interval of seven or eight years, we are brought to the opening of Domitian's reign, and that, in fact, is the moment when Tacitus must have committed his recollections to writing. Later he would not have preserved a remembrance so present or so sharp an impression of the words that he had heard. But is it really that of the work's publication? I have great difficulty in believing so; it does not seem to me possible that it could have appeared whilst the persons of whom the author speaks, or whom he causes to speak, were still alive. How would he have dared to say of Eprius Marcellus and Vibius Crispus, one of whom used to sit by his side in the Senate, and both of whom had enjoyed the confidence of the Emperors, that they were dishonourable men in whose destiny there was nothing to envy, and that their lives were spent in fearing and causing fear?[1] I am inclined to think, then, that the *Dialogue* was written in the earliest years of the reign of Domitian, read to some friends no doubt, retouched perhaps on several occasions, without ever losing its youthful air and the amplitude of its Ciceronian style, then finally published when the world lived under a prince 'under whom one could think what one would and say what one thought.'

But here another difficulty presents itself, and one no less embarrassing. The work is a dialogue, it puts in conflict persons who express very diverse ideas. Is there one of their number whom Tacitus has appointed to speak for him? Which among the opinions maintained by the various interlocutors are those which are his and to him can be ascribed with certainty? It is this which we would like to know, and it is just this which we do not discern very clearly. He asserts that for the composition of his work he has need of nought save memory, 'that he will faithfully reproduce the reasonings of the interlocutors and the course of their arguments, as he heard them, in such a manner

[1] *Dial.* 8 and 13.

that their character and mind can be recognised.'[1] It is certain that Aper, for example, is very determined and highly egoistic. Tacitus has presented him to us as he must have been, violent in debate, with an upstart's instincts, loving eloquence most for the noisy triumphs and material delights which it procures. Obviously it is not he who voices the thought of Tacitus. It might rather be Maternus, the amiable and brave Maternus, who roughly handles the informers and deals tyrants their desert. But, in his capacity as a poet, Maternus celebrates the peace of the woods and the charm of solitude, to gain which he counsels flight from 'the insensate and slippery Forum'; whilst Tacitus, on the contrary, at the very moment when he put the words into Maternus's mouth, dreamed only of plunging into the perils of political life. He who best represents him is Vipstanus Messalla, a man of action and a student, a soldier and a scholar, still quite young and already famous, 'the one man who had thrown himself into the civil wars with honest intentions.'[2] It is natural that Tacitus, who seems to have been his friend, who never speaks of him without the warmest sympathy, may to him have confided in the *Dialogue* the defence of ideas which were common to them both.

We have, moreover, an entirely safe means of assuring ourselves on this point. To detect which are really the principles that belong to Tacitus in his work, let us seek, so far as it is possible to know him, those which he practised in his own life and made his rule of conduct. Messalla does not conceal that he has little taste for the rhetors and their method of teaching. Over against that pedantic education, a mixture of artificialities and cut-and-dried methods, he sets up a picture of the old Roman education in the time of the Republic. He exhibits the young man led by his father to the abode of some orator of renown, admitted to his intimacy, helping in his work when he is preparing to speak in public, following him to the Forum, and 'learning to fight upon the field of battle.'[3] This virile and practical method of training

[1] *Dial.* 1. [2] *Hist.* iii. 9. [3] *Dial.* 34.

youth must have pleased Tacitus, and he had himself made the experiment. He tells us that he attached himself to the two men who passed for the most eloquent of that epoch, that he not only listened to them speaking in public, but bore them company when they went home, entered their house and shared in their most familiar colloquies.[1] The method seemed to him good, for, later, when he himself became a man of importance, he did for others what had been done for him. Pliny, when writing to ask him to send masters to the school he was establishing at Como, told him to select them from 'amongst that studious youth which the renown of his talent attracted about him.'[2] Young men, then, came to hear him and profit by his example, like those who, under the Republic, frequented the house of famous orators, and it was thus that he breathed new life into those ancient traditions regretted by Messalla.

In another passage of the *Dialogue* Messalla revives on his own account a great idea of Cicero, who insisted that the orator before entering on the Forum should have studied all, known all, or, at least, skimmed all, and that no branch of knowledge should be quite strange to him. He was not to apply his intelligence to some particular profession until he had extended and strengthened it by a general culture, 'even as the earth is sown only after it has been turned and turned again several times.' This is very much Messalla's view also. He affirms that the oratorical genius is not confined to the narrow limits within which the school claims to restrict it, and that it cannot be reduced, for all preparation, to those few precepts of practical dexterity which the rhetors provide; he wishes that the orator, like the soldier, should not march to the battle unless armed at all points; he maintains that 'it is thanks to this extended erudition, this variety of studies, this universal knowledge, that eloquence truly worthy of admiration rushes forth and like a river overflows.'[3] There is no doubt

[1] *Dial.* 2; these were Marcus Aper and Julius Secundus.

[2] Pliny, *Epist.* iv. 13.

[3] *Dial.* 30. *Ita est enim, optimi viri, ita: ex multa eruditione, et plurimis artibus et omnium rerum scientia, exundat et exuberat illa admirabilis eloquentia.*

that Tacitus thinks as Messalla; we can rest assured that he was not content to learn what the rhetors taught, that he wished to attain as wide a training as possible, and that he touched all the acquirements of his time. His works everywhere afford us proof of this; but we shall find it more especially in those digressions, to which he gave so important a place and which in his case merit particular atttention.

No doubt there had already been digressions in Sallust; they even occur in Livy, though in small number; but those of Tacitus are of a different nature. Sallust scarce treats of anything save general questions of ethics or history; Tacitus, as we are about to see, is on the contrary varied in his topics. Livy flatly declares that he introduces them into his narrative to give its readers a moment's rest and diversion.[1] In Tacitus they are usually short and dry, and it is only too clear that he has not been working for his readers' amusement; he has no other aim than that of instructing them. He is a very well informed person himself, who, whenever the contingency of events brings him in contact with a custom, a belief, an institution, an ancient tradition, about which he believes he has some useful knowledge, cannot refrain from sharing it with others, at the risk of slightly embarrassing his narrative. These digressions are not always well introduced; they are sometimes ill-combined with the rest, which proves that they are his own, that he has not found them in the historians of whom he makes use. The slightest pretext suffices for their insertion in his work; he justifies them by very simple excuses, sometimes a little naïve, as, for instance, by these words: 'it will not be unseasonable,' or 'I shall soon have occasion to say, *non fuerit absurdum, non erit longum.*' Most often he does not trouble to justify them at all, thinking the reader's interest in them will withhold him from complaint. Of these digressions the greater number refer to the Roman constitution, and the changes it has undergone, to the ancient and modern magistracies, to the distribution of the legions throughout the Empire, etc.; one can

[1] Livy, ix. 17, 1: *legentibus velut diverticula amœna.*

understand how subjects of this nature might have occupied a young man aiming at public life. Others relate to religious matters, especially to what must have been less familiar to the Romans, the foreign religions. Egypt, with her mysteries, seems to have exercised a certain fascination on the imagination of Tacitus;[1] he boasts of knowing her better than others.

Speaking of Serapis, he complacently tells us that none of

[1] One of the most important passages in Tacitus on the subject of Egypt is that in which he relates the visit of Germanicus to the monuments of Thebes (*Ann.* ii. 60, 61). I was anxious to know what was to be thought of the accuracy of the narrative; and I could do nothing better than have recourse to the science of my colleague and former pupil, M. Maspero. I transcribe his reply here, somewhat lengthy though it be, convinced that the reader will be grateful to me for having omitted nothing.

'The information upon Canopus and Hercules, with which chapter 60 commences, constituted in the time of Tacitus part of a common stock of notions about Egypt, which are to be met with in the Alexandrian writers and their disciples. Tacitus could have borrowed them from twenty different works, and they would not prove that Germanicus saw the country in any other fashion than that of an ordinary tourist.

'The passage relating to the stay at Thebes is, on the contrary, characteristic. If we are to judge by the monuments still extant to-day, the aged priest who served as interpreter showed the Romans two series of monuments which relate to two different Pharaohs, but which are to be found in two adjacent portions of the Temple of Karnak: (1) a copy of the poem of Pentaour, which narrated the exploits of Rameses II. during the campaign of the year 5; (2) the *Annals of Thothmes III.*, in which were enumerated, year by year, the quantities of spoil received by the Temple of Ammon on the return from each campaign in Asia.

'(1) The poem opened with an enumeration of the peoples leagued against Egypt, of which several, the Mysians, Ilians, Lycians, really belonged to Asia Minor. The natives, proceeding on the principle that their Sesostris had surpassed all conquerors succeeding him, interpreted the names in accord with the geographical knowledge of the time, and they had no hesitation in identifying nations, which we now know to have dwelt between the Euphrates and Mediterranean, with Bactriana, Media, Persia, and Scythia. That the explanation was given on the face of the wall seems clearly proved by the presence of the historical name of Rameses, the only one recorded in the texts, surrounded by the cartouche, in place of the legendary name of Sesostris. The statement as to the number of inhabitants nowhere occurs; but the passage in which Rameses speaks of the millions of warriors and myriads of young men, to whom he preferred the protection of Ammon, might be taken literally in a hurried perusal of the inscription, and suggest the idea of a real army drawn up on the fields of battle.

'(2) The *Annals of Thothmes III.* exactly correspond to the description given by Tacitus, and do comprise "the details of the tributes imposed upon the peoples, the weight of the gold and of the silver, the number of men and horses, the offerings for the temples in perfumes and ivory, the wheat and other provisions which each nation must supply." These tributes, certainly, are not to be compared with those levied by the Romans and the Parthians, but one can understand how certain very

the writers at Rome has yet learned whence that God derived his origin,[1] and for its explanation he invokes the testimony of the Egyptian priests. Here again his position can explain his having made a particular study of these religions; he was member of a sacerdotal college, and this college (*quindecimviri sacris faciundis*) was specially deputed to keep watch over the foreign worships, which made it necessary to know them. There are, finally, other digressions which simply testify to an open and curious mind attracted by knowledge for its own sake; those, for example, in which he informs us of the ancient *pomœrium* and the topography of certain quarters at Rome, telling us how they were formerly named and through what vicissitudes they have passed; and that, above all, in which, having mentioned the new letters which Claudius took it into his head to invent, he relates the origin of the alphabet.[2] Let us take this occasion to remark that in these subtle problems Tacitus is very well informed. All his contemporaries attributed the invention of the alphabet to the Phœnicians; Tacitus traces it back to Egypt, and he has been confirmed by modern science. Letters were supposed to have been passed on by the Etruscans to the Latins; he asserts that they received them directly from the Greeks. The question is to this day debated amongst scholars; but the view maintained by Tacitus is that adopted by Kirchhoff and Mommsen, whence we see that he drew his science from good sources.

We can affirm, then, that, in conformity with the ideas expressed by Messalla in the *Dialogue*, Tacitus did not hold himself bound, like Aper and so many others, to the teaching of the rhetors, and that he studied what was not to be learnt in the schools. Perhaps

high figures read off rapidly by the interpreter may have seemed to give the idea of a considerable amount.

"To resume: this passage in Tacitus assuredly reproduces the narration of some eyewitness of the scene. One could almost point out to a certainty the places to which Germanicus and his retinue were conducted, and those where they paused to receive the priest's explanations and gaze at the wall on which he deciphered what he told them.'

[1] *Hist.* iv. 83: *origo dei nondum nostris auctoribus celebrata.*

[2] *Ann.* xi. 14.

in doing so he dreamed more especially of the profit it might bring his eloquence, but the profit was greater than he had thought. Whilst these studies were achieving the making of a great orator, they were developing other gifts within him; his intellect was acquiring thereby a flexibility and a breadth which fitted it for tasks of another nature. The curiosity which they awoke in him, the taste for learned researches and accurate knowledge with which they inspired him, the ideas which they gave him of his country's institutions, of Rome's past and that of the other peoples, were preparing him to become when the moment should arrive, without effort and without difficulty, a historian.

II

Philosophy in the education of Tacitus. Seneca. Quintilian's struggle with Seneca. Which side Tacitus espoused.

Among the sciences which Messalla recommends to youth is philosophy. He strongly insists on the necessity of an acquaintance with it, and presents the advantages to be derived. From this we must perhaps conclude that when Tacitus wrote the *Dialogue* he had a somewhat keen sympathy with philosophy, and that there was some moment, doubtless in his youth, when, like almost all his contemporaries, he had surrendered to its charms. Even then, however, he was careful to point out that it must not be studied for its own sake but for the services it afforded to eloquence. 'It is not a question of constructing a city of Stoics; it is an orator we are forming, not a sage.'[1] He did not stop at this, and later, as he advanced in years, it seems as though experience made him less favourable to philosophical studies, and as though he believed he saw that, carried beyond certain limits, they had dangers. He expressly says so in several passages of his books, and it has been noted how he everywhere mingles some reserve with what eulogies he makes of philosophers and philosophy. It is clear that, while it assuredly inspires him with high esteem, it also inspires a certain mistrust and, as it were, an

[1] *Dial.* 31.

uneasiness which he cannot throw off. Let us attempt to unravel the causes and significance of this.

At the moment when Tacitus was born philosophy was enjoying a very rare chance; it was ruling the world. For at least five years Seneca, its most illustrious representative, was Nero's prime minister, and Trajan estimated those five years as one of the Empire's happiest periods.[1] The worthy folk, however, who enjoyed that bright interval between two tempests, were poorly satisfied with him who procured it them. Perhaps they had expected of philosophy more than it could give, especially in an age so corrupt and under so wicked a prince. It must not be forgotten that Seneca was not free to act as he would, and that he had to let much evil pass in order to have the power of doing a little good. Nero had already slain his brother; he was preparing to slay his mother. Undoubtedly Seneca had no direct participation in those crimes, but he did not prevent them; and he even appears to have profited by the first to enrich himself, and to have resigned himself to writing the apology for the second.[2] The reproaches which, on this occasion, the philosopher seemed to deserve rebounded on philosophy, and thus, instead of reaping an advantage from Seneca's position, it found itself thereby in evil case.

For the rest, the antipathy felt by the Romans to philosophy had another reason, and one far deeper than the defects or weaknesses of him at that moment its representative. Those even who admired the writings of Seneca were quite conscious in reading them that they comprised a doctrine which went in the teeth of that of their fathers. They had always been told that the Roman was before all else a citizen and must live for his city alone, and that

[1] Aurelius Victor, *De Cæs.* v.: *quidam prodidere Trajanum solitum dicere procul differre cunctos principes Neronis quinquennio.*

[2] I err perhaps in speaking of resignation. Of this apology we possess a witty and well-turned phrase, which shows that Seneca had retained in its composition all the grace and freedom of his wit. Relating how Agrippina killed herself out of regret for having been unable to kill her son, he makes Nero say: '*Salvum me esse adhuc nec credo, nec gaudeo*' (Quintilian, viii. 18). This pretty phrase was much admired in the rhetoric classes.

time unconsecrated to her service was lost time. For this principle philosophy substitutes another. For it, before you are a citizen you are a man; above the circumscribed city to which you belong by birth, there is a city more spacious, which is that of the whole world, humanity. Behold, then, man divided and bound to serve two countries. Old Cato said that since the Roman owed himself in entirety to his particular city, it was essential he should render it account both of his occupations and his leisure, which is equivalent to saying that for him there is to be no leisure, and that he must spend his whole life as labourer or soldier or magistrate. All who act otherwise are idlers (*otiosi*), people who do nothing or do nothings, which comes to the same thing. Seneca thinks differently and dares to say so; he maintains that we must needs serve the other city, the universal city also, by endeavouring to be useful to men, and that nothing is more useful than to increase their knowledge, to console them in their miseries, to enlighten them in their doubts, to set them in their wanderings on the right path. Thus at one stroke letters, science, and philosophy are legitimised; and not only is the name of idlers inapplicable to persons who study the wonders of the world and labour to understand that they may explain them, but it must not even be given to those content to contemplate these wonders, for in admiring them they testify to the divine creation.[1] How can a Roman admit that, side by side with the active life and almost on the same level, the contemplative life is authorised? But Seneca goes further; he rigidly applies his principles and from them deduces all their consequences. This great city which he imagines, 'and which contains both men and gods,' contains all men without exception. Aliens and foes (the same thing for the Romans) are not barred out; slaves too are included. We have duties to them because they are our brothers: man, whosoever he may be, 'must be sacred for man.'[2]

[1] *Hæc qui contemplatur quid Deo præstat? ne tanta ejus opera sine teste sint.* All that I have just said is taken from the treatise *De Otio.*

[2] *Epist.* 95, 33: *Homo res sacra homini.*

These were words unheard till then, and they must have caused prodigious amazement. If they were literally applied, the whole fabric of the ancient world was shaken. Confining ourselves to Rome, nothing could be more antagonistic than such novelties to the very spirit of the institutions and to the character of a city, which, in her poet's phrase, 'lived on her ancient manners.' Whilst people generally professed to respect the traditions and regard them as sacred, Seneca seems to hold them of small account; in him we rarely find those emphatic eulogies of the old Republic in fashion elsewhere. He judges it coldly, and if he has to celebrate certain heroes, he does so on condition of making them philosophers of his own type and of glorifying himself in their person. The world around him repeats as a maxim that all was better in former days, and that men only change for the worse; he, for his part, believes in progress, he has confidence in man, he affirms that humanity is ever advancing to perfection, and, instead of turning piously in the direction of the past like every one else, he looks forward to the future.

It may well be thought that this audacious philosophy left no one indifferent. By its elements of novelty and generosity it attracted youth. We are told that the young men had no longer any but Seneca's books in their hands.[1] And, nevertheless, it was at the very moment when, to all appearance, it had most chance of success, during the reaction following Nero's death, when the *Letters to Lucilius* and the *Pharsalia*, two masterpieces to be eagerly devoured, had just been published, that it met the adversary who assailed it with most ferocity and who, I believe, ended by having the best of the argument. Assuredly Quintilian seems a very small personality compared with Seneca, but he had a powerful party at his back and derived a special authority from the functions with which the Emperor Vespasian had just invested him. As public professor of eloquence at Rome, he went forth to oppose Seneca before the face of youth, that is to say, in the very scene of Seneca's triumph.

[1] Quintilian, x. i. 126.

We only know this contention to-day by Quintilian's work, the *Oratorical Institutions*, which he published when it was ended and had grown cold; so far as possible he reduced it to no more than a literary controversy. One is conscious of the slight embarrassment which the great name of Seneca causes him; he is careful to condemn in him only the head of a new school, hostile to Cicero and the ancient orators. But with the others he is more at ease. When he speaks of philosophers in general he lets expressions escape him which reveal the whole extent of his hatred, and show how spirited must have been the attacks which he made upon them before his pupils. He charges them with being insolent fellows who have only admiration for themselves and despise the rest of men, people who are taken for sages, because they are of austere countenance and have a long beard, but who, when out of sight, indulge in all their vices.[1] These violences of expression shock us, especially when we remember that the philosophers were then banished from Rome by a decree of Domitian, and were astray on all the roads of the Empire. But their unpleasant tone and lack of generosity must not lead us to misconceive the importance of the controversy. In this struggle between rhetoric and philosophy there was something other than a scholastic feud and professional rivalry. Nowadays we oppose speech to action, but speech was then regarded as action itself; it directed policy, it inspired those resolutions that decide the salvation or the ruin of states; it was speech which led the world, *regina rerum oratio*; consequently it is the rhetor, forging this terrible weapon, who is in reality the responsible and practical man. The philosopher, on the contrary, is wrapped up in his theories and dreams; he is not in touch with reality and never comes out upon the public place. His researches are those of a man who lives in the shade of the study, far from the stir of affairs, *studia inertia, umbratilia*. Naturally he attracts to him persons unfitted for action, for

[1] These words are harsh, but not more so than those of Seneca, when he says of all sciences other than philosophy: *An tu quidquam in istis credis esse boni, quorum professores turpissimos omnium ac flagitiosissimos cernis?* (Seneca, *Epist.* 88, 2).

whom calm and repose have charms, and those also who do not like taking pains; for staying peacefully at home to reflect and dream is not truly working. And so Quintilian feels himself entitled to define philosophy: an insolent sloth, *pigritia arrogans.*[1] Grave interests, then, were involved in this polemic which to us seems futile; Quintilian mainly represented in it the return to ancient traditions and the protest of the past against the new doctrines.

The opinions of Tacitus strongly resemble those of Quintilian; only he expresses them with much more moderation. He cherishes no personal hatred of the philosophers. Far from approving Domitian for having exiled them, he says that it was nothing short of the proscription of virtue, and that, in suffering it to be Rome gave a striking example of servile patience. With little sympathy for Seneca, he paints a fine picture of his last moments; he speaks respectfully of Thrasea and Helvidius Priscus, but in reality he is not of their party. A passage in the *Life of Agricola* affords us his real conviction: 'I remember,' he says, 'of having often heard him relate how, in his early youth, he had acquired a keener zest for philosophy than became a Roman and a senator, but how his mother's prudence cooled this excessive ardour. The fact was that his soul, naturally lofty and enthusiastic, pressed with more passion than discernment towards all that offered the semblance of glory. Soon age and reason tranquillised him, and from the study of wisdom he gained, what is very rare, moderation in wisdom itself.'[2] By a close inspection of this curious passage we find all the reproaches which Tacitus brings against philosophy expressed with remarkable tact and discretion. It is in the first place clear that he does not include moderation and sense of proportion among the virtues with which it inspires its votaries. It is not that they seem to him, as to so many others, incorrigible malcontents; he is not himself responsible for the phrase about Stoicism which he ascribes to an informer: 'That sect brings forth none save ambitious spirits and mischief-makers.'[3] But he con-

[1] xii. 3, 12. [2] *Agric.* 4.
[3] *Ann.* xiv. 57: *secta quæ turbidos et negotiorum appetentes facit.*

siders that the habit of proceeding from inflexible principles and deducing stringent conclusions may give the mind a certain brittle rigidity which draws it into useless imprudences. He admires but does not approve those who risk their lives to no one's profit.[1] The rash acts they commit are often due to their vanity; it is still a reproach that he makes them. They are too vain of their renown for wisdom and virtue and too anxious to nurse it;[2] they willingly applaud themselves and do not disdain the applause of others. 'There were people,' he says, 'who reproached Helvidius for being too concerned to have himself talked about, but glory is the last passion which a wise man renounces.'[3] From all this he draws the conclusion that philosophy must only be taken in small doses, that if pushed too far 'it is in contradiction with the Roman and the senator.' Its study may be permitted without danger to him who does not feel courageous enough to attempt political life, or is unwilling to take the trouble, for Tacitus is very near thinking like Quintilian 'that many cloak themselves with the fine name of philosopher so as to conceal their indolence.'[4] But the man of action who aims at public functions, who is one day to enter the Senate, must hold aloof from a science only fitted to produce thinkers and students. The true Roman knows naught of Seneca's distinctions between the man and the citizen. His city claims him in entirety; he owes himself wholly to her service. Thus Tacitus returns to the somewhat narrow and jealous conception which the old Romans formed of patriotism, and it is his chief reason for distrusting philosophy.

[1] *Ann.* xiv. 12: *sibi causam periculi fecit, ceteris libertatis initium non præbuit.* It is on the subject of Thrasea.

[2] This prepossession is very finely indicated in that passage where it is said of Thrasea that he did not wish to give way: *sueta firmitate animi et ne gloria intercideret* (*Ann.* xiv. 49).

[3] *Hist.* iv. 6.

[4] *Id.* iv. 5: *non, ut plerique quo nomine magnifico segne otium velaret.*

III

Tacitus in the fashionable circles of Rome. The society of the period. The change brought about by the reign of Vespasian. How Tacitus speaks of women and depicts them. General ideas in Tacitus.

Education is not wholly achieved at school; masters begin it, but it is completed in the circles we frequent and by the people we meet there. It cannot be questioned that Tacitus lived at Rome in what is called society. He was no stranger to it by birth, and the brilliancy of his initial efforts must have made him in request.

At this distance it is hard to enter it with him and realise how things passed. By their very nature such social gatherings escape the public eye a little, and they then had particular reasons for concealment. Power held them suspect; it was to them very often that it went to seize its victims. It had misgivings that the distinguished participants had little enough love for it, and that, when they believed themselves amongst friends, they spoke out freely and did not hesitate to repeat the witticisms and epigrams made against the prince. If by ill-luck some unknown informer found admission, or merely some indiscreet guest unable to hold his tongue, these pleasantries were punished as State crimes. The delightful circle which, at the opening of Claudius's reign, had formed about the Emperor's nieces, the three daughters of Germanicus, and of which Seneca was apparently the soul, was broken up at a year's end, by death or exile, because it fell under Messalina's suspicion. Nevertheless such terrible examples discouraged no one. Under the very eyes of the informers, on the morrow of some startling execution, the dispersed gatherings reassembled. The pleasure of seeing and talking to each other caused all perils to be braved, even as in the prisons of the Terror interrupted conversations and intrigues were resumed a few steps from the guillotine. Thrasea was denounced to the Senate, he was known to be a lost man; and yet a party of men and women

of the great world had betaken itself as usual to his gardens, where philosophical questions were being discussed up to the moment when the quæstor arrived, bearing the master of the house the order to die.[1]

In a very curious passage of his *Annals* Tacitus tells us something of the life of contemporary aristocratic society.[2] He states at the outset that it was about the time of the Empire's inauguration that luxury was carried to its height at Rome. The great families, stripped of part of their political privileges, thought to distinguish themselves from the rest of the citizens and still maintain their rank, by leading a life of magnificence. They had been left the right to seek their own ruin, and they abused it. Table expenditure, the splendour of villas, the multitude of slaves, the quest of masterpieces of art and furniture of great price, prodigality towards friends, clients, and freedmen, impaired the largest fortunes. The severities of the imperial authority against all who bore great names and had great possessions did the rest.

During the period extending from Augustus to Nero the ancient Roman aristocracy almost entirely disappeared. In its place formed another, proceeding from the municipal cities of Italy or the provinces. Those new nobles brought to Rome the simple and thrifty habits which were usual with them at home, and, although the majority may have succeeded fairly soon in amassing great fortunes, the old spirit prevailed. Reform was especially due, adds Tacitus, to the example of Vespasian. He was a good citizen of Reate, belonging to a family of soldiers and petty bankers, who detested etiquette and pompous ceremonies, and who was never so happy as when he went to look again upon the little house where he was born, and when, instead of those murrhine vases costing fortunes, he drank from the silver goblet which had served his grandmother and brought back to him his own quiet childhood.[3] The Emperor's example and the desire to please him by imitation were more effective than all the sumptuary laws of the ancient Republic.

[1] *Ann.* xvi. 34. [2] *Ibid.* iii. 56. [3] Suetonius, *Vespasian*, 1 and 2.

This information is quite confirmed by Pliny's correspondence. It is notorious that Pliny assumed a kind of affectation of being in touch with everybody of any importance. Now, it is rare to meet among those to whom he writes with names belonging to the ancient aristocracy. Of those descendants of liberty, *posteri libertatis*,[1] as he calls them, the cruelty of the Cæsars had spared but few.[2] It was only quite recently that Vitellius had put to death a Dolabella guilty of no other crime than that of coming of the family of the Cornelii.[3] We are therefore rather surprised, after so many Pisones had been slain, to find one still alive in Trajan's reign, reading minor poetry before an indulgent audience.[4] But this is an exception; nearly all Pliny's correspondents bear new names, and the majority are natives of the Gauls, Africa or Spain. As a rule they have made their way by honourable paths. The fathers have held the municipal magistracies at home; the sons, having passed through the army or served in financial posts, have come to settle at Rome, there to found families of senators. All profess great affection for letters; it is one way of justifying and ennobling their fortune. Not only have they studied eloquence in their youth: to speak well is an indispensable accomplishment for a Roman magistrate; but they take an interest in philosophy or even compose elegies and epics. I do not believe that in any other period has literature been so greatly loved. Seneca even considers that it is loved too much, and that people carry their taste for it to the point of mania: *litterarum intemperantia laboramus*.[5] It was, in short, a very agreeable society, which no longer had the distinction and high bearing of the early days of the Empire, but in which were still to be found, with a less spacious life and simpler manners, much elegance and wit.

[1] *Paneg.* 68.

[2] Tacitus, *Ann.* xi. 25: *paucis jam reliquis familiarum quas Romulus majorum et L. Brutus minorum gentium appellaverunt, exhaustis etiam quas dictator Cæsar et princeps Augustus lege Scenia sublegere.*

[3] *Hist.* i. 88. Many of those who survived died of hunger. A Gracchus practised the meanest trades (*Ann.* iv. 13). An Asinius was a forger of spurious wills (*Ann.* xiv. 40); the greater number lived on the charity of the prince, like the Versailles nobility on the liberalities of Louis XIV.

[4] Pliny, *Epist.* v. 17.

[5] *Epist.* cvi. 2.

Such was the environment in which Tacitus is to be figured during the peace of the prosperous years of Vespasian and Titus, in the moment of his first oratorical triumphs, at that happy age which, to use Aristotle's phrase, has not yet been humiliated by life, and in which the present is illumined with all the hopes of the future. We are tempted to think—and not, I believe, unjustifiably—that he must have worthily maintained his position in this environment. He was assuredly a man of incisive wit; we are conscious of it in his works despite his self-imposed gravity. They include strokes of sarcasm, fine ironies, charming subtleties of expression, stories so much the more piquant for their reluctance to seem so, in which the malice is only revealed by a passing word and lets itself be divined though unseen. Such, for instance, is the facetious anecdote of that madman, who, convinced on the faith of a dream that he knew the spot where Dido hid her treasures, came to offer them to Nero, and of the stupid trustfulness of the prince, who, counting on the money promised him, began by squandering what he had left; 'whereby,' Tacitus slily observes, 'expectation of fortune became one of the causes of public misery';[1] and the misadventure of that poor philosopher who took it into his head to preach peace to two armies about to fight, and would have been cut in pieces by the rival parties, had not prudent friends arrived on the scene in time to make him renounce his unseasonable wisdom;[2] or again, the story of the general, dubious which side to take and in mortal fear of compromising himself, who on his way to seek Vespasian pressed forward or halted, according as the news was favourable or the reverse.[3] These passages and many others which I could cite[4] permit us to gather what Tacitus must have been in society or with his friends, when he was under no need of constraint and could let his irony flow freely.

[1] *Ann.* xvi. 3. [2] *Hist.* iii. 81. [3] *Ibid.* ii. 85.

[4] I should grudge not recalling this passage at least from Nero's letter to Seneca in which he said to him: 'Thine arm and sword would not have failed me, had it been needful to fight.' There can be no more subtle mockery at the expense of a professor of philosophy. It is to be noted that in this interchange of letters between the Emperor and his former teacher (*Ann.* xiv. 53-57), the prince seems to make the finer figure.

We know that women were not excluded from social functions at Rome and even took a leading part in them. Since for us Tacitus is a grave, almost solemn figure, we find it rather hard to picture him in their company; it may be he was more at ease there than we imagine. True, on occasion he uses them somewhat ill; speaking of the wife of a freedman who encouraged her husband to betray his master, he says that 'she gave him evil counsel, a woman's counsel.'[1] Elsewhere having to mention a person who seems to him very frivolous, a mere sayer of good things, he decides that 'he had the wherewithal to please the women.'[2] But Seneca had said many other hard things of them, which did not prevent his being the Roman ladies' protégé and favourite. These sayings of Tacitus are, too, only whimsical asides; he is speaking more seriously when he points out, 'that a woman deserves so much the more gratitude for her good conduct, in proportion to the severity of the judgment passed on her ill-doing';[3] which is perfectly just. Under Tiberius the question was raised in the Senate, with reference to certain troubles which had occurred in the provinces, whether it would not be advisable to prevent legates and proconsuls from taking their wives with them when they went out as administrators. As is his custom Tacitus frames a contradictory debate: one orator charges the wives with being the cause of all kinds of disorders when they accompany their husbands to their governments, and another defends them.[4] The two speeches are drawn up with such care and impartiality that one can scarce distinguish on which side Tacitus leans. But on this point we know from another source that he is with those who are favourable to women, since he took his own wife with him when he left Rome after his prætorship. As for those women who played a political part and of whom he has to speak in his works, he paints them more especially in action, the best manner, and they are very life-like. In Messalina he lets

[1] *Ann.* xv. 54: *uxoris quoque consilium assumpserat, muliebre ac deterius.*
[2] *Ibid.* v. 2.
[3] *Agric.* 6: *nisi quod in bona uxore tanto major laus quanto in mala plus culpæ est.*
[4] *Ann.* iii. 33, 34.

us see into what frenzies a woman can be swept, who has gratified all her fancies, who is satiated of ordinary pleasures, and who risks all to find one she does not know. To this figure he opposes that of Agrippina, as little scrupulous as the other, but using her beauty only in the service of her wealth or her ambition. He tells us that she led the Empire 'with a man's hand';[1] and yet she is a woman still, for she ruins herself by her exigencies and her vanity, showing herself as greedy of external distinctions as of the reality of power. Poppæa encounters Nero, the vainest, most susceptible of princes, a real spoilt child; and, perceiving that the timid Octavia has wearied him with her affectionate solicitude, she endeavours to rule him by disdain. She rails at him for the meanness of his sentiments, his infatuation for a freed slave, his obedience to his mother's wishes; she is constantly holding up to him as a contrast the handsome Otho, one of the kings of fashion, so elegant, so distinguished in his manners, so lavish in his largesses; she does not conceal her regret at having left him and threatens to return. It is probable that Nero, despite his passion for her, did not submit to these taunts without some wrath, and that he sometimes tried to resist them. It was no doubt in one of these outbursts of his uncontrollable nature, some day when she was heaping reproaches upon him, that he murdered her with a kick.

These pictures, so living and so realistic, are certainly those of an observer who has gone about in the world, who has not acquired all his knowledge of man in books, but has beheld him close, and to whom the study of men whom he has seen with his own eyes has given a better comprehension of those he meets in history. Thence also those brilliant reflections, given the name of *sententiæ*, which hold so much sound sense in so few words, and which he has scattered in profusion through his narrations. They were then much in fashion; a very great number are to be found in Seneca and all the contemporary writers. But those of Tacitus are not, as so often are the others', merely showy conceits,

[1] *Ann.* xii. 7: *adductum et quasi virile servitium.*

ingenuities of style, gilded fineries. We feel that they are based on reality and come direct from life. And therefore it is not only a literary pleasure that they afford us. Undoubtedly we admire their air of grandeur and the pungent flavour he has given them; but we are still more impressed by the profound knowledge they manifest of passions and characters. They reawaken in us reflections of our own, they express more accurately and vividly ideas vaguely suggested to us by personal experience; we apply them also to persons we have known or to incidents of our life, and this kind of communion, which our surprised recognition effects between the author and ourselves, is one reason for our interest in reading him.

IV

The first appearance of Tacitus at the Forum. His success. His marriage. His political career. Tacitus under Vespasian. Under Domitian. His prætorship.

The education of Tacitus must have been completed in the earliest years of Vespasian's reign. Take it for all in all, it was a blissful epoch, and appeared the more so when the terrible crises just lived through were recalled to mind. The moment was favourable to a young man anxious to make a name. Tacitus prepared for it by following the orators of renown, 'to whom he listened,' he tells us, 'with great youthful ardour and a wonderful passion for learning.'[1] When he considered that he knew enough and had heard others to sufficient effect, he undertook public speaking in his turn.

We are unaware before what tribunal he first presented himself, but it is very probable that he was successful from the start. The younger Pliny, who made his *début* but a few years after him, lets us know that Tacitus, even then, was 'in the prime of glory and renown.'[2] So reputation reached him very speedily. What he was as an orator we do not precisely know, none of the speeches

[1] *Dial.* 2.

[2] Pliny, *Epist.* vii. 20.

which he himself delivered having been preserved. But those which in his works he so complacently attributes to historical personages permit us to conjecture, for the probability is that he composed them after his own methods and habits. Here again Pliny supplies us with an important detail: coming from a sitting of the Senate, he writes to one of his friends: 'Tacitus spoke with great eloquence, and, what is characteristic of his talent, with dignity.'[1] It is thus indeed that we conceive of him; Bossuet calls him 'the most dignified of historians,' doubtless he was also the most dignified of orators. That he had a great passion for an art to which he owed so early a fame is unquestionable; there is no form of success so inspiriting, especially in youth, as that afforded by eloquence. One of the characters of his *Dialogue*, after describing the kind of intoxication a man feels in imposing his opinions upon a whole audience, insists on what he calls the secret joys of the orator, those which he alone can appreciate. 'Does he bring with him a carefully finished discourse? his inward feelings have, like his speech, a certain calm and assurance. Does he come forward, not without some nervousness, with a brand new composition scarce polished to perfection? the very anxiety is a charm which makes success more flattering and pleasure more intense. But it is the audacities of improvisation that procure the keenest delights; for of genius it is as of earth: whilst we esteem the fruits of long cultivation and painful toil, the products that spring up spontaneously are still more agreeable.'[2] It seems to me that there is a very personal note in these words, and that they sound like confidences.

This success which placed Tacitus in the front rank of the youth of his time, had for him weighty consequences. It may first of all be supposed that it facilitated his marriage. In 77 he was betrothed to the daughter of Agricola, and he married her the following year. It was a great match. Julius Agricola, his

[1] Pliny, *Epist.* ii. 11: *respondit Cornelius Tacitus eloquentissime, et, quod eximium orationi ejus inest, σεμνῶς.*

[2] *Dial.* 6.

father-in-law, was by birth of that healthy and vigorous provincial nobility which formed the strength of the Empire. His ancestors belonged to Fréjus; his father, Julius Græcinus, settled at Rome and entered the Senate. He was an orator and a philosopher, but before all else a good man. 'He had too much virtue,' said Seneca, 'to suit a tyrant.'[1] Caligula would fain have forced him to turn informer, and, as he declined, had him put to death. Agricola was brought up by his mother, who happened to be a woman of high distinction and took great care of his education. He attended the schools of Marseilles, a city where, according to Tacitus, 'reign in happy harmony Greek refinement and provincial sobriety.'[2] Subsequently he served in Britain under Suetonius Paulinus, and there acquired a taste for military life. Although before all a soldier, he did not confine his talents to the business of his profession. He was on occasion a man of the world, a highly intelligent administrator, a very skilful politician, as well as an excellent general. At the time of his daughter's marriage he held a high position at Rome; he was consul, and on the eve of setting forth for Britain, the conquest of which he was to complete.

Tacitus, who, as we have seen, does not care to introduce the public to his private life, has said but a word of his wife. In telling us of his betrothal to her he calls her 'a young maiden of fair promise.'[3] This at first sight seems somewhat faint praise; but the manner in which he speaks of his father-in-law, the grief caused him by his death, the book which he consecrated to his memory, show how grateful he was to him for having bestowed on him his daughter.

Another consequence of his oratorical successes was his entrance on political functions. 'My political position,' he says, 'was commenced by Vespasian, augmented by Titus, and carried still higher by Domitian.'[4] In so sharply indicating the three steps

[1] Seneca, *De Benef.* ii. 21.

[2] *Agric.* 4: *locum Græca comitate et provinciali parsimonia mixtum ac bene compositum.*

[3] *Ibid.* 9: *egregiæ tum spei filiam.*

[4] *Hist.* i. 1.

which he has successively mounted, he seems indeed to denote the three stages by which, as a rule, a man rose to the supreme dignity, that is to say, the consulate. We must needs believe, then, that Vespasian made him quæstor,[1] Titus, ædile or people's tribune, and Domitian, prætor. In this career the first step must have been the most difficult. The quæstorship opened the portal of the Senate, and the number was great of those who desired to enter. The twenty appointments as quæstors, granted annually to that impatient youth, were therefore very hotly contested. The Emperor reserved to himself a certain number of them, which in all probability he accorded by preference to young men of talent, who, being not of the senatorial aristocracy by birth, found the more difficulty in succeeding by their own exertions. This was precisely the case of Tacitus, and what completes the proof that he must have been directly chosen by the Emperors for the quæstorship, as for the other functions he obtained, is that he feels it necessary to assure us that these favours which he has received at their hands will not influence his manner of judging their acts. Tacitus, then, was in all the magistracies what was called 'a candidate of Cæsar.' It was the special patronage of Vespasian that launched him in political life, it was Domitian's choice that invested him with the highest function that could be fulfilled before the consulate. He was prætor in the year in which it pleased the prince to celebrate the secular games, and, being at the same time member of a very important college of priests, he was by this double qualification one of those who presided over those magnificent feasts. He was then thirty-three; for a 'new man' he had come to the front very quickly.

We must then picture Tacitus at his entrance on public life as a protégé of the Empire, and it is natural that he should be thence a strong partisan of the imperial régime.[2] It was not against the

[1] This, at least, is the opinion of Nipperdey in his *Life of Tacitus* which he has prefixed to his edition of the *Annals*. Urlichs believes, like Borghesi, that Vespasian granted him the laticlave, but Nipperdey's view seems the more reasonable.

[2] Those sentiments are to be found at the end of the *Dialogue on the Orators*, which was probably written about that time.

grain when the Emperor was Vespasian or Titus. Certainly Vespasian's government was by no means very liberal. In armies that old soldier had acquired the habit of order and discipline; he held strongly to keeping all to their duty, and was of no humour to let his authority be contested. We know that he had Helvidius Priscus put to death, and that, for the first time, he banished from Rome the philosophers who, no doubt, seemed to him babblers, harmless indeed, but vexatious. Those severities must have saddened Tacitus, but he felt that the Empire after so many agitations had need, before all else, of peace, and he was grateful to a prince who sought its preservation, even by slightly harsh measures. He must therefore have given him whole-hearted service.

The accession of Domitian put him to a harder ordeal. Clear-sighted spirits had always distrusted that shy and solitary young man with his ruddy countenance and big, lustreless eyes. Although at the beginning of his reign he may have uttered a few of those fine humane phrases which move the admiration of the simple, his evil instincts were notorious. It was known that his father had been on the point of taking rigorous measures with him, and that he had caused his brother the most cruel annoyance. Thus his attainment to the Empire caused observers nothing but uneasiness. Nevertheless he at first managed to contain himself. The younger Pliny tells us of an epoch 'when he had not yet manifested his hatred for honest folk.' No doubt he considered it safer and more honourable for him to appear their protector. It was the moment when Pliny was quæstor and people's tribune, and when Tacitus obtained the prætorship. I do not believe that Domitian was much more loved then, but assuredly he must have been less hated. Later the memory of those early days, less gloomy than the rest, grew effaced, and the whole reign was comprehended in the same curse. Tacitus, in the *Agricola*, no longer distinguishes between those fifteen years of tyranny. 'Fifteen years,' he says, 'a long period in human life, during which, in silence and inaction, young men reached old age and old men the term of their exist-

ence.'[1] In this there is a little exaggeration; Tacitus did not remain for fifteen years dumb and inactive; he performed public functions, he must have spoken in public. In reality, as we are about to see, the reign of terror, in which good people hid themselves and held their peace, only lasted four or five years; but those years have weighed so heavily upon Tacitus, he has experienced so profound an impression, that they are all he remembers.

V

Tacitus legate of the Emperor. The *Germany*. How it must have been written. Character of the work. What was the intention of Tacitus in writing it?

In 89, immediately after his prætorship, Tacitus left Rome; we know of this on his own authority, and his absence lasted four years. What he did during those four years we divine without his telling us; he went to perform one of the administrative functions which were assigned to those who had just vacated the office of prætor. He was appointed, as it was said, lieutenant of the Emperor, '*legatus Augusti pro prætore*, and in that capacity either took command of a legion or governed what was called an 'imperial province.' This name was given to those which the Emperor had particularly reserved to himself because they were harder to defend and required the presence of a garrison. This is all that is known for certain; if we wish to go further and obtain fuller information, we can only make certain conjectures, but conjectures that are probable enough.

And, first of all, of the two offices available to him after the prætorship, which was that filled by Tacitus? We do not know positively. All that can be said is that one of the two befitted him much less than the other. There seems indeed little enough likelihood, when we know him, of his having commanded a legion. At the moment civil and military capacities, mingled and confounded in the same citizen during the Republic, were beginning to draw apart. Since Augustus had instituted standing armies

[1] *Agric.* 3.

war had become a profession; it was rarer to be at once a man of the tribune and a good general. The soldiers, who no longer left the camps, were ready to jeer at people who lived peacefully at home, and called them peasants, *pagani*.[1] The latter for their part suspected soldiers of being usually ill-bred, dull-witted, and ruffianly, to such a degree that Tacitus deems himself bound to affirm 'that he finds those among them who have no less refinement of character than wearers of the toga.'[2] But although he takes their vindication upon him here, it is very plain that he was an outsider to their profession, that his weapon was, above all, the spoken word, and that all his battles were fought before the courts and, later, in the Senate. He no doubt did his military service for six months or a year; it was the condition of his reaching public honours; but he probably did it in the fashion of his friend, the younger Pliny, who worked in the offices of the governor of Syria, writing documents, and did not even have sufficient occupation in that, since he found time to attend the courses of the Antioch professors of philosophy.[3] This was not enough to give any taste for or knowledge of soldiering, and it must be admitted that this manner of 'living for some months the life of camps, and mixing in it as little as possible'[4] ill disposed a young man for the subsequent command of a legion. We can suppose, then, that Tacitus, who in all probability had done as Pliny and as many of the young men of his circle and time, found himself unprepared to occupy a military post after his prætorship, and that he rather governed a province.

Let us push our conjectures a little further; let us ask what that province could be, the government of which was entrusted to Tacitus. It certainly seems that to this question but one response can be made. We possess a very important work of his on the

[1] I should be inclined to say *pékins*, if this word, formerly in use among ourselves, were not beginning to grow obsolete since everybody is a soldier.

[2] *Agric.* 9.

[3] *Epist.* iii. 11. Pliny was a steady young man. Many others profited by their military service to amuse themselves: *militiam in lasciviam vertunt*, says Tacitus (*Agric.* 5).

[4] Pliny, *Paneg.* 15.

manners and customs of the Germans, which supposes him to have had a close survey of the men and of the country about which he speaks. We are therefore led to suppose that he must have spent some time in the vicinity of Germany; now, among the imperial provinces governed by a former prætor there was but one situated in that region, which was Belgic Gaul; whence the conclusion that Tacitus must there have passed the four years of his absence from Rome, and that it was there that he collected the notes which assisted him in the composition of his work.

The *Germany*, to retain the title usually assigned it, was only given its final form and published under the second consulate of Trajan in 98, five or six years after Tacitus had left Belgic Gaul; but there is no doubt that he amassed the materials for it whilst administering the province. How would the idea have occurred to him of enlisting the public's interest in those barbarous peoples, 'that hideous region, that gloomy sky, those fields refractory to tillage which sadden the prospect,' had not the occasion been afforded him to study them at close quarters, and had he not had something fresh and personal to say?[1] It is indeed apparent that he had firsthand acquaintance with those giants whom he depicts for us, with their grey eyes, their red hair, their shields daubed with gaudy colours, their close-fitting garments which contrast with the ample robes of the Sarmatians or Parthians. If he had not the curiosity to push beyond the frontiers and acquire a personal impression of the countries he wished to describe, we may be sure that he questioned the officers or traders who had seen them; more than once also he must have met barbarian chiefs, who had been defeated in some war in the interior and came seeking an asylum of the Romans.[2] Kritz considers that in what Tacitus tells us we 'may recognise the tone of a man who has got the Germans to talk to him, and states their replies,

[1] *Germaniam . . . informem terris; asperam cœlo, tristem cultu aspectuque.* (*Germ.* 2.)

[2] Tacitus tells us that Agricola made one of the petty kings of Britain, who, driven out, had taken refuge in the Roman camp, talk about his country (*Agric.* 24).

preserving, so far as possible, the exact terms they have used.[1] It is of them that he learns of the latest events come to pass in that turbulent world of incessant ferment and change. They give him the news that the Bructeri have just been vanquished and expelled from their territories by a coalition of rival nations, that the Cheruscans, who put Rome in such a panic when they had Arminius at their head, have entirely lost their supremacy; they have let themselves be overcome by love of ease. They have long been complimented on no longer troubling their neighbours' peace; 'people used to say, the good, the just Cheruscans, but now they are no longer feared, they are treated as fools and cowards.' It seems as though, in reading the *Germany*, we could divine the questions that Tacitus must have put to those he interrogated. They are not the questions of a man whom we are asked to regard as a rhetorician only concerned with fine phrases. He seeks on the contrary to obtain precise and practical information; he is desirous of knowing what among the Germans are the principles of government, the system of property, the constitution of the family. He even descends to very small details and inquires how their houses are built, on what foods they live, what beer is, what is the money they are readiest to accept in exchanges, and so on. We find ourselves in a full and minute reality. Apart from two or three slightly mannered and polished phrases and a few that seem too poetical for the subject, rhetoric is entirely absent from the *Germany*. We do not find in it those imposing prologues and perorations then fashionable, from which Tacitus has not abstained elsewhere; he enters abruptly on his subject, and leaves off when he has nothing else to say.

Landscape descriptions are rare in the ancient historians. Even in the *Germany*, where they would have been most appropriate,

[1] *Barditum vocant . . . hastas ipsorum vocabulo frameas vocant . . . succinum glesum vocant. . . .* Elsewhere he very accurately describes the military equipment of the Germans (*Ann.* ii. 14), and he tells us that the victory of Arminius is still sung in his time, as one who knows it for certain, *canitur adhuc apud barbaras gentes* (*Ann.* ii. 88). Reference can be made on this subject to Kritz's preface to his edition of the *Germany*.

Tacitus has availed himself of them very little; he remarks, no doubt, what must have impressed an Italian exiled to those lands,—the gloomy woods, the great marshes, the thick fogs, the severity of the climate, the dreariness of long nights and dark days; but he is content to record his impression in a single touch and pass on. Here, as elsewhere, he is above all an admirable painter of men. With a sure and rapid glance he has grasped the essential qualities of the race. Contrariwise to the habits of Southern people who crowd together and form groups, the German prefers to live solitary. He does not dwell in towns, he does not like his house to be huddled against his neighbour's and round about it he leaves an open space, he means to keep himself to himself. In Greece and at Rome the community absorbs the individual and lays down the law to him; in the German the individual resumes his importance. Thence his better qualities: self-respect, love of independence, the sense of honour. Tacitus has, too, understood the religion of the Germanic peoples very well; although a little too apt to indulge in his countrymen's habit of seeking everywhere for the Græco-Roman gods, he makes it quite plain that this is no cheerful religion, no religion of festivals and songs and dances like that of the Greeks; it is grave and sombre, it does not shut its gods within the walls of temples, it believes it unworthy of their majesty to represent them under human forms, it consecrates to them the woods and forests, 'and worships without beholding them in those mysterious solitudes.' This religion of no temples and no images makes us think of Protestantism. 'Germany,' says J. Grimm, 'was the natural soil of the Reformation.'[1]

It is not surprising that moral descriptions have a large place in the book of Tacitus. He unreservedly admires in the Germans their integrity of family life, their serious conception of marriage, their respect for women, the manly education which they give their children. We can understand his being unable to accord

[1] I only sum up here what M. Geffroy has stated so ably in his book entitled, *Rome et les Barbares.*

these eulogies without letting fall some bitter reflections on the manners of the Romans, both men and women, of his time. Adulteries are rare in Germany; it is not as at Rome 'where to corrupt and to yield to corruption is called living in the fashion of the day.' To force a young man to marry there is no need to promulgate oppressive laws: 'More powerful with them are good manners than with other peoples are good laws.' There is no necessity for hedging women round with a rigorous supervision: 'they live in the keeping of chastity, far from the shows that corrupt morals and the feasts that inflame the passions.' As they cannot write, there is no ground to suspect secret correspondence. Usury is unknown, the freedmen possess no special influence, the slaves are only employed in the fields: 'it is the woman with her children who busies herself with the domestic cares of the house.' These contrasts are indicated with so much complacency, that the question has been put whether the work is not merely a satire on Roman manners. I do not believe it. Certainly, when an occasion presents itself for scolding his contemporaries, Tacitus does not let it escape him. But in the present case these lessons in morality only occupy a few chapters, and it is impossible that the book has been composed solely for them. There is no need to search so far for the motives of Tacitus in writing it. He wished to interest the Romans in nations with which it behoved them to be acquainted and which they had many reasons to dread. Seneca had already said to them some years previously: 'Who more indefatigable than the Germans? To those vigorous bodies, to those souls unwitting of pleasures, luxury, wealth, add but a little more tactical skill and discipline; I say no more: you will only be capable of holding your own against them by returning to the virtue of your sires.'[1] Tacitus thinks like Seneca; he has seen those peoples from close at hand, he perceives what menaces are pregnant in that barbarism which people affect to despise; it seems to him much more formidable to Rome than the Parthians of whom so much is noised, and he is bent on sharing his patriotic

[1] Seneca, *De Ira*, 5, 10.

alarms with his fellow-citizens. Such, I believe, is the design of the *Germany*.

However this may be, this book has an especial importance for the question we are trying to solve. It shows that at the moment when Tacitus, in his province, was accumulating and ordering the elements of which he was later to be formed, he already possessed the qualities exacted by the new profession to which he was to devote his life. The historian was ready; he no longer lacked aught save an occasion for writing history.

VI

The return of Tacitus to Rome. State of Rome at the time. The last years of Domitian. His death.

When Tacitus returned to Rome in 93, the political situation had become much worse. It is the property of tyrannical forms of government to grow steadily more exasperated. Victims summon victims. At the outset Domitian had only dealt his blows at intervals, allowing breathing spaces from time to time (*per intervalla et spiramenta temporum*): little by little the intervals crept closer together, and condemnations ended by succeeding one another almost without pause.

He was not a madman like Caligula, nor a fool like Claudius. On certain sides he rather resembled Tiberius; like him he governed the Empire well. He kept vigilant watch on the pro-consuls and pro-prætors who administered the provinces, and beneath his sway the world was not unhappy. But, along with some good qualities, he had still more bad. The son of an economising Emperor, simple, opposed to display and pomp, happy to recall his humble origins, he formed an absolute contrast with his father. He was intolerably vain and insolent; he took pleasure in humiliating those about him. Not only was he bent on the reality of power, but he delighted in its outward shows, even the most futile. He abolished the prudent measures by which Augustus had sought to dissimulate his sovereign authority that it might

be accepted with the less repugnance. He had himself commonly called 'our Lord and our God, *Dominus ac Deus noster*.' In all things he aimed at being master and appearing so. Naturally all that seemed to surpass him gave him offence; he distrusted high-mindedness, talent and virtue. This distrust increased still more after the wars which he waged with the Germans and Dacians. His armies had not always been fortunate, and he did not wish it known. In his court the successes won were exaggerated and the defeats carefully hushed up. The official poets, Statius and Martial, were not lacking in songs of triumph; but the Emperor was very dubious whether any one was deceived by their falsehoods, and he felt the need of terrorising people to prevent them from speaking. What aggravated the evil still more was that Domitian had the pretension of being the reformer of public morals and glorified himself therein. But, unfortunately, this prince, so severe on the faults of others, was himself very vicious. He had made stringent laws against adultery; and he lived publicly with his niece, the daughter of Titus, whom he had taken from her husband and whose death he caused by attempting to procure her miscarriage. This contradiction was repulsive, and he was not ignorant of the indignation which it caused. Everywhere, therefore, he detected allusions to his conduct. Whenever the moralists attacked vice in general, it seemed to him that it was of himself they meant to speak. He began by punishing individually, with death or exile, the most illustrious among them; then he took the course of banishing them all in a body without distinction. The professional philosophers who had assumed the little cloak and gave lessons to the young people of aristocratic families—they were then very numerous—were forced to depart. It was a general dispersion; some lurked hidden in the suburbs of the great Italian cities; others returned to Greece or Asia whence they had come; there were some even who fled to barbarous countries.

Tacitus arrived just at the moment when the crisis was in its acutest phase, the very year in which Domitian put to death

Senecio, Arulenus Rusticus, the son of Helvidius, and the most honourable men of Rome, and in which the philosophers were banished. How the Emperor received him on his return, and what was his position so long as Domitian lived, one fact permits us to conjecture. According to the rules regulating promotion in the public services, the consulate could be attained two years after the prætorship. Now four had elapsed when Tacitus came back, and neither then nor during the three years following was he named consul. Evidently he was not in his master's good graces. Are we to believe that he was suspect to him because of his talent, or was he reproached with being the son-in-law of Agricola? In any case he had to recognise to what danger he was exposed, and chose to let himself be forgotten. 'It was,' says Pliny, 'what an upright man could best desire.'[1] There was no other safety for him. But if in this manner Tacitus escaped death, what melancholy, what shame was he not forced to endure! As a former prætor he could not dispense with going to the Senate; Thrasea had paid with his life for the crime of having stayed at home on the day when Nero was acclaimed for having slain his mother. This example was a warning to Tacitus not to absent himself from the sittings. He was, then, an eye-witness of the horrible tragedies which went on there during three years. It is not enough to say he was a witness; he too must have played his part. He joined in the absurd flatteries with which the prince was overwhelmed, he voted with acclamation the monuments raised in his honour, the titles decreed him. What is sadder still is that he condemned without protest all those whose removal was desired; he says so plainly at the end of the *Agricola*. They were honourable men, sometimes personages of high rank, who were known, esteemed, loved, and whose opinions all the senators shared. Domitian persisted in arraigning them before those who were their friends, almost their accomplices; he wished to cast the odium of their condemnation upon others: 'I shall see plainly,' he said to the senators on the judgment day, 'whether you have any affection

[1] Pliny, *Paneg.* 90.

for me.' Then, all through the deliberations, he watched the judges, noting their slightest qualms, the pallor which betrayed itself on their faces, the sighs which they could not stifle. The unhappy wretches, conscious of having that pitiless eye upon them, lost all sense of proportion. Out of judges they made themselves executioners. They laid hands upon the accused, and the Emperor had to intervene to prevent them from tearing him to pieces. Tacitus could not recall those terrible scenes without a shudder. 'Our ancestors,' he says, 'knew the extreme of liberty; we, for our part, have known the extreme of servitude.'

What added to the bitterness of the situation was that it seemed without issue, and that it was impossible to see whence deliverance would come. Domitian was no more than forty, he was in the prime of his manhood and vigour. No mutiny of the armies could be looked for; the soldiers, whom he had loaded with favours, were entirely devoted to him. The provinces, which he administered very ably as we have just said, had no reason to oppose him. The populace was grateful for the fine shows he was constantly giving them, chariot races in the circus, combats of men and women by day or night in the amphitheatre. As to the aristocracy, it assuredly detested him,[1] but it was too worn out, too decimated, too timid, ever to form a great conspiracy against him, like that of Piso under Nero. It was his friends who achieved what his enemies dared not undertake. His wife, for whom he had an insane passion although he knew her unfaithful to him, whom he had once put away, then taken back, and who dreaded a return of wrath, joined with some of his freedmen, who, all-powerful one day, were uncertain of their lives on the morrow; and one morning in the month of September, 96, they assassinated him in his bed-chamber.

[1] Here is an anecdote which shows to what pitch Domitian was hated by it. The younger Pliny relates that, having gone to see an important personage called Corellius Rufus, he had found him suffering cruelly from gout. 'Why do you suppose,' said Corellius to him, 'that I resign myself to enduring these intolerable agonies? I should free myself from them by death, were I not anxious to survive that brigand, if but by a day.' In point of fact, when Domitian had been murdered, Corellius let himself die of hunger (Pliny, *Epist.* i. 12).

VII

Tacitus after Domitian. Consulate and proconsulate. He takes the resolution to write history.

With Domitian dead, things resumed their former course. Honest men ceased to skulk in the shadow, tongues were loosened, the Senate was once more in movement and alive, perhaps even a little more so than the new Emperor, Nerva, would have wished. Those who had been stopped short in their career were reinstated in their rank; public honours, which had been reserved for those with least scruples, were restored to the most worthy. Tacitus was consul from the following year, at the earliest date possible, and in that capacity had the opportunity of delivering the eulogy of a great man, Verginius Rufus, who had just died at the age of eighty-three. Two years afterwards the Senate entrusted him, in conjunction with his friend the younger Pliny, with the prosecution of a fraudulent proconsul who sold *lettres de cachet*, as was done under Louis XV.; and we are told, in reference to this case, that he had retained all his eloquence. As to his later years, they escape us. All that we know of him comes from a recently discovered inscription in Caria, which proves that he never lost his interest in the service of the State. It informs us that towards the close of Trajan's reign he was proconsul of the province of Asia, which was regarded as one of the great posts of the Empire. From that moment we no longer know anything of his career.[1]

But another career had begun for him; at the same time that he resumed his old occupations, he took up new. Less than two years after Domitian's death, scarce out of his consulate, when he was more than ever involved in affairs, he published his earliest books of history.

[1] We are quite ignorant in what year Tacitus died. From his not having written, as he announced he would, the life of Augustus and the history of Nerva and Trajan, it can scarce be inferred, though it is usually done, that he did not survive the completion of the *Annals*. Many reasons may have prevented him from keeping his promise.

Grudging of confidences as he is, he has nowhere stated what decided him on doing so, and what reasons led him, whilst remaining an orator, to become an historian; but it seems to me that they may be easily guessed. First and foremost, we are bound to admit that he must have had a natural taste for history and that probably he never neglected it. In that broad-based education which Messalla recommends to young orators, and which Tacitus was capable of giving himself, history had certainly its place. That he had read the great historians of Rome, Sallust and Livy, and much admired them cannot be doubted, since in the result he frequently imitated them. But he also studied the others, even those of the Republican epoch, who were little known, and to whom, he considered, sufficient justice was not done. He has occasion to mention one by name, Sisenna, in reference to a fact which he quotes. Those whom he leaves unmentioned served him for those digressions which, he tells us, he has drawn from the memory of the past, *ex veteri memoria petita*. It even seems from some indications that he already had in youth the idea of writing historical works. In that passage of the *Dialogue* in which Messalla compliments his friends on not confining themselves to pleadings before the judges or declaiming in the schools, but devoting themselves to other activities also, 'such as nurture the mind and give it an agreeable recreation, scientific and literary,' he especially praises one of them, Julius Secundus, who, whilst making a great name at the bar, has found time to write the biography of an important man of the time; and he encourages others to follow this example.[1] It may apparently be concluded that Tacitus, who speaks by the mouth of Messalla, proposed to imitate Julius Secundus, and that he no doubt dreamed of combining, he too, some historical studies with his everyday labours. If he did not do so, it was because politics and business left him no liberty for it; they never relax their hold when once they have seized on you, and you become their slave so soon as you have made yourself their servant. Unforeseen circumstances were need-

[1] *Dial.* 14.

ful for Tacitus to escape them, and find it possible to give himself up to what was his essential taste and afforded him his glory.

Those hours of leisure which were lacking to him, Domitian's tyranny supplied. For three years he filled no magistracy, and we have just noticed that he scrupulously held aloof from public affairs. He went to the Senate like others when it was convoked; but, apart from the fact that in the Senate of Domitian there was scarcely any speaking, he out of prudence had condemned himself to not speaking at all. One can understand how this silence weighed upon him. It is a cruel vexation for a politician with whom all has succeeded so far, and who reckons on the future reserving him still greater triumphs, to find himself suddenly stopped dead in the height of his reputation, in the height of his prosperity. Tacitus has spoken with an eloquent bitterness at the beginning of the *Agricola* of those fair lost years, during which a man in his prime feels he is little by little reaching old age and risks being no more, when the storm shall have passed, 'than a survivor of himself.' Active as he was, of an open and inquiring mind, he could not rest doing nothing. But what did he really do? It is scarce probable that he busied himself with eloquence, which till that moment had been his greatest passion. Eloquence is an art that does not suffice to itself; it supposes a public, and we do not prepare speeches which there will be no opportunity of delivering. But there are other studies which befit solitude and contemplation, to which we devote ourselves for our satisfaction and enjoy in seclusion without having need of communicating them to others. History is one of this class: with a few good books we can always treat ourselves to the pageant of the past when desirous of turning our thoughts from the present. There was, moreover, a special reason which at that moment must have drawn Tacitus to history. Nothing was more painful to the people of that melancholy epoch than the spectacle of the greatest crimes being consummated without resistance and almost with the general assent. All was accepted without a murmur; no one dared utter a word either in public or even amongst friends; the

spy had suppressed friendship. All heard in the silence was the flatteries of a quaking Senate and the laudations of mercenary poets; and as, by ill-luck, those poets, Statius and Martial more especially, were men of talent, it might be feared that their voices, having deceived contemporaries, would mislead posterity. To inform it of the truth only history could be counted upon. Is it not history that may truly be described as 'the conscience of humanity'? It is permissible to believe, therefore, that it was then, amid his saddened and solitary reflections, that Tacitus finally determined to write history.

And so from the first moments of deliverance, 'as soon as one began to live again,' we see him setting himself to the task, and it is a book of history that he undertakes to create. His subject was soon chosen; events had taken it upon them to provide him with it. There was such whole-hearted wrath against the régime just escaped, that those who had suffered from it did not refuse themselves the pleasure of cursing it. Scarce aught else was to be heard in the public lecture-halls; from every side people piously flocked to hear the eulogy of Domitian's victims and to honour the memory of those whom he had dared to put to death. It was under those circumstances that Tacitus prepared to write a work which was to contain, he tells us 'the memory of past servitude and the testimony of present happiness,' which means, I consider, that he proposed to relate the last years of Domitian and the early days of the new government. He thereby found occasion both for doing homage to the princes 'under whom Rome began her new birth,' and, by recalling the crimes of the last Flavius, to re-establish the truth shamefully travestied in official falsehoods.

However eager he might seem to be for the accomplishment of his project, he turned aside for a moment and began by writing the *Life of Agricola*, his father-in-law, which must date from the first few months of the reign of Trajan, and, almost simultaneously, in 98, he brought out the *Germany*, which, as we have seen, had no doubt been prepared some time previously. Had he any particular reason for publishing them now, or was he simply

desirous of feeling the pulse of opinion, like Sallust and Montesquieu, of training his hand by a shorter effort for a work of considerable length? This is a question to which we shall recur later. He had, at least, not renounced his great work, and constantly thought of setting about it.[1] Only, in the interval his ideas were modified, and when he resumed his labours the subject was no longer quite the same. At first he had only wished to relate 'past servitude and present happiness,' that is to bring out the contrast between Domitian and his successors. Reduced to these terms it was but a topical work, the interest of which weakened as the revolution which had inspired him with the idea of writing it grew remote. He began by withdrawing 'present happiness' from his programme, clearly perceiving that it would be no easy matter to speak with perfect freedom of Nerva and Trajan, and that it was not worth while to repeat the *Panegyric* of the younger Pliny. 'I reserve,' he tells us, 'that task for my old age';[2] which is perhaps a polite way of renouncing it. There remained 'past servitude'; but, had he confined himself to relating the crimes of Domitian, the book would have been a mere pamphlet and have had no other importance. To give it greater scope he decided to go back to the death of Nero, and to include in his narrative Vespasian and Titus as well as Domitian. Thenceforth his work changed in character. It covered the whole of the second imperial dynasty, and formed a complete and well-defined theme of strong interest, which led from the end of the Cæsars to the beginning of the Antonines. With this new work Tacitus entered upon history on the grand scale.

[1] He says himself, at the beginning of the *Agricola*, that he has only written this book in anticipation of another: *hic interim liber*.

[2] *Hist.* i. 1.

CHAPTER II

THE CONCEPTION OF HISTORY IN TACITUS

I

The laws of history in Cicero. Can we say like him that it is 'an orator's work'? What is true in this definition. Its possible danger.

WHEN Tacitus began writing, Rome had already brought forth great historians, who enjoyed universal admiration and whom it was very hard not to imitate. Their example was a law, and a man like him, so attached to the past, so respectful to ancient traditions, must on principle have been less tempted than another to shirk its observance. I think then that if we wish to know how he conceived of history, we must seek to learn how it was conceived of before him.

It is Cicero who will instruct us. On several occasions he drew up the rules of the historical form, and the historians who followed him acquiesced in them. It was thus that he was led to concern himself with the question. Towards the second half of his life, when he wrote the *De Oratore*, he cherished few illusions on the position of the Republic. It needed no great perspicacity to notice that day by day speech was losing its importance, and that difficulties would soon be settled by force alone. Besides, he had then delivered most of his finest discourses, and in that field could scarce add to his renown. And so he dreamed of a new departure and sought to discover in what medium he might one day employ his flexible talent, so as to preserve his authority over the enlightened public. Later, when the moment for making the choice foreseen had arrived, when eloquence was absolutely forbidden

him and he had to turn to other studies, he decided on philosophy; but previously he had seemed to have an inclination to history: 'It is,' he said in a famous passage, 'the coeval of the ages, the torch of truth, the soul of memory, the mistress of life.'[1] He also appreciated how fully it befitted the practical genius of the Romans, and he clearly perceived likewise that the nature of their government made its cultivation a necessity. None better proved than he that the Roman constitution was no product of political metaphysics, springing at a single flight from the conceptions of a sage, like that of several Greek cities, but that it was the work of time and of men; that it slowly and spontaneously assumed its form by the strife of antagonistic forces, which, unable to destroy one another, came to mutual terms; and that history consequently is indispensable to understand when and how the diverse elements of which the constitution was composed entered into the whole and the place they filled therein. Another motive impelling him to turn to history is his conviction that, despite its importance to the Romans, they have had in it very limited success. He is very severe on the ancient annalists who knew not how to write; as for those who later, like Cælius Antipater, went to school with the Greeks, they seem to him to have imitated their masters ill, and in fine he has no hesitation in saying: 'We have no history, *abest historia a litteris nostris.*'[2] There is then a good opening available, and he naturally asks himself what are the qualities exacted of those who claim to hold it, that is to say: what are the laws of history?

The first is that the historian must be truthful. 'It is needful that he should carefully verify the date of the events which he relates, that he should describe the scene of their occurrence, that he should indicate the causes and results, that he should depict the manners and characteristics of the actors, above all that he should judge them without passion and tell things exactly as they happened.' A brief and striking phrase serves him to sum up these obligations: '*ne quid falsi dicere audeat, ne quid veri non*

[1] *De Orat.* ii. 9. 36. [2] *De Legibus*, i. 2.

audeat.'[1] To tell the truth, the whole truth, without weakness and without reticence, such is the supreme rule: have we found any better to-day?

But to tell the truth, the truth must be known, and that is not always easy. There is a whole science, delicate and complicated, of discovering the documents in which it is contained, in selecting them, estimating their value, and interpreting them. Were the ancients acquainted with this science and did they practise it? In general it may be doubted. At any rate Cicero says nothing of it, which seems a fair proof that it appeared to them neither so material nor so difficult as it does to us. They were not strangers, nevertheless, to what we call 'criticism'; Quintilian tells us that it was taught in the schools.[2] Under the name *judicium*, the critical spirit was one of the qualities cultivated by the grammarian in his pupils; he exercised them either in correcting corrupt texts or in expunging from the list of an author's works those not really his, 'as bastards are expelled from the family,' or, finally, in comparing authors one with another and assigning them their relative rank. It is hard to admit that criticism was not applied to history as it was to grammar. The simplest common sense must teach a historian that it is before all else essential to satisfy himself of the evidence he uses and estimate its worth.[3] We have proof that Tacitus, to speak only of him, did not neglect to do so. When a judgment to be passed on Seneca is in question, he tells us that we cannot wholly rely on what Fabius Rusticus relates, since he was his intimate friend;[4] elsewhere he gives us to understand that works published whilst the Flavian dynasty was in power cause him suspicion when they refer to a person or event of that epoch.[5] We perceive that in these two cases at least he has taken precautions to be accurately informed and to choose witnesses worthy his confidence; and certainly he must have done

[1] *De Orat.* ii. 15.

[2] *Quint.* i. 4, 3.

[3] To show that they did so I could refer to certain passages in Suetonius, notably to that in which he seeks to verify the birthplace of Caligula (*Caligula*, 8.) It is a model of historical discussion.

[4] *Ann.* xiii. 20.

[5] *Hist.* ii. 101.

so more often than he tells us. But it is remarkable that in such cases he does not always feel bound to mention it. If he says nothing, it is evidently because nobody was concerned to know. The reader did not insist on the historian citing his sources and discussing them before him. He readily took his word, and, if the narration looked reasonable, was disposed to accept it as true. This was, we must recognise, a pernicious attitude to assume, which many historians must have abused.

On the other hand there were qualities from which there was no inclination to dispense historians, and which, at need, took the others' place. Naturally it is upon those latter that Cicero most insists. To explain how it was that the earliest authors to write the history of Rome succeeded so ill, he tells us they were chroniclers rather than historians. They were ignorant of the art of presenting the truth agreeably, or, to speak as he does, they narrated the facts, but knew not how to embellish them, *narratores rerum non ornatores*. It is eloquence alone that 'adorns and embellishes' what it touches, and unfortunately they were not eloquent. So he sums up his thought in an expressive phrase for which he has been much reprehended: 'History,' he says, 'is, before all, an orator's work, *opus oratorium maxime*.'[1]

Before Cicero's opinion is judged it must be understood. Did he mean to say, as is generally supposed, that the oratorical genre and the historical genre were one and the same thing? I do not think so. He has clearly distinguished them elsewhere,[2] and his disciple Quintilian expresses the master's feeling when he counsels his students to read the historians, but not to copy them, 'for nearly all that in them is a merit becomes in an orator a defect.'[3] What, then, can Cicero's idea really be? It seems to me that it cannot be explained unless we give the words *orator* and *eloquence* a wider scope than that usually ascribed to them. The elder Seneca points out that the art of oratory does not merely prepare

[1] *De Leg.* i. 2.

[2] Notably in the *Brutus*, 83, where he says of a Greek orator: '*historiam non tam historico quam oratorio genere perscripsit.*'

[3] *Quint.* x. 1.

for public speaking, but is a sort of general training which leads to everything.[1] It was thus that the word *eloquentia* had come to mean not only prose literature as opposed to poetry,[2] but literature in general.[3] An eloquent man was not only one who spoke well, but one who had the art of writing well. In this sense to say that history is an orator's work is not to affirm that rhetorical methods must be employed, but that it is a task for an artist, a piece of literary handicraft which exacts the same qualities as others, and demands great care in composition and no neglect of style. Thus understood, what is to be thought of Cicero's view?

In our day many sound intellects, intent before all else on accuracy, would fain impose the rigour of scientific methods upon history, and cordially urge it to adopt Tillemont's methods as a model rather than those of Michelet. And yet it is certain that history will never be turned into a science like physics or chemistry. Even when reduced to nothing more than a collection of facts, which to some persons appears a marvellous means of suppressing arbitrary judgment and error, these facts have no resemblance to those which a man of science observes in his laboratory and describes as he sees; they are not the product of blind forces, invariably acting in the same manner and, when put under certain conditions, incapable of acting otherwise. They proceed from a mobile, changing, irregular being, whom it is necessary to have studied personally and in his own nature, to fathom the reasons for the actions ascribed to him and even to affirm their reality. Thus knowledge of man, the study of usages, passions and characters, are essential to history, what constitute it a literary art proper. Moreover, when it is with the past we are dealing, we cannot get at the facts themselves in a direct manner, we only perceive them through one or several intermediaries. They only

[1] Seneca, *Controv.* ii. *procem.*

[2] It retains this sense on the lecture-lists of certain of our faculties of letters, in which the name of the professor of French and Latin Eloquence is set opposite that of the professor of Poetry.

[3] Tacitus applies the name of eloquence to lyric poetry and elegy. Pliny (*Epist.* vi. 21) says: '*non est genus quod absolutissimum non possit eloquentissimum dici.*'

exist for us in the accounts of those who have been their contemporaries and witnesses, and the accounts do not always tally. Very often they contradict each other; it is rare for people who have seen the same incident to relate it in the same way, and for those who have lived on intimate terms with the same person to judge him in the same manner. Between these diverse estimates it is for the historian to choose. With the fragments of truth, which he picks up, a little here, a little there, he must build up a whole. Into this task there necessarily enters an element of personal creation, and those who claim to withhold him from introducing aught of himself would constrain him to produce nothing better than a work resembling the convent chronicles, as compiled in the Middle Ages, or our examination manuals. I may add that, when we wish instruction of the past, we presumably prefer it to be presented to us as it was, that is to say alive. Very anxiety for truth, which we set above all else, demands it. A table of contents, comprising the principal events stated and dated, with a reference to the learned dissertations in which they have been elucidated, would not do our business. We long to be afforded the spectacle of these events, we wish to see them; and truly it is an art, perhaps the rarest, the most precious of all arts, to have the power of giving them life; whence it follows that a historian, while at the same time a scholar, has need to be an artist. If this be what Cicero has wished to imply, the law which he proclaims is incontestable; it applies to all times, and perhaps befits our own time even more than his. Never has there been greater need to declare that the study of documents, to which some would claim to confine us, is a preparation for history but not history itself; that we must interpret them, work them up, not rest content with setting them down in juxtaposition; and that, to use a comparison of Taine's, they resemble the scaffoldings which serve for the building of a house and disappear when it is finished.

But if Cicero's definition seem perfectly reasonable when the word orator is taken in its broadest sense, it must be admitted

that it is very possible to take it literally, and that it may then be full of peril. The oratorical art was at that time the literary art *par excellence*; notably in the imperial literature all turned on eloquence. The author, whatsoever he writes, feels all the time as one addressing an audience. To get himself read he practises the methods taught by the rhetor to get oneself listened to. In his style he pursues pomp and brilliancy; in his manner of narration he is absorbed with effects and scenic setting. He skilfully disposes his details, grouping and arranging them so as to add to the point of his stories. On occasion he can even be tempted to go further. In the schools of the rhetors where youth was brought up, the one anxiety was to please. The subjects generally treated being fictions, the young men were free to present things under what seemed to them the most favourable aspect. To show them at their best they distorted them at their own caprice, adding such details as they might imagine, called in the language of the school, *colours*; and he who devised the most startling *colours* was sure of winning most applause from his schoolfellows.[1] The liberty thus assumed had no great inconveniences, since it usually affected only fictitious personages and imaginary subjects; occasionally, however, there were also subjects borrowed from history (*suasoriæ*), and, in other cases, real events drawn from the memory of the past might be pleaded as arguments. The young rhetorician felt under no obligation to treat them with more respect than the rest; he adapted them without scruple to the necessities of the situation; he gave way to the desire of finding opportunities for fine images, and, to take an instance, had no hesitation in altering the circumstances of the death of Coriolanus when anxious to draw an eloquent comparison between him and Themistocles. It was Cicero himself who gave him leave. 'When the rhetor invokes history,' he says, 'it is not forbidden him to lie.'[2]

[1] Reference may be made for these usages of Roman pupils to the study, following later, on *The Schools of Declamation at Rome.*

[2] *Brutus*, 11: *concessum est rhetoribus ementiri in historiis ut aliquid dicere possint argutius.*

Thus young men did not learn care for accuracy and respect for truth at the school. What they acquired was bad intellectual habits, and, if later they became historians, they might be tempted not to renounce them in that capacity. It was a danger for them, and some even of the greatest did not always escape it.

II

What can be gathered from the prologues of Tacitus to elucidate his conception of history? His severity to the historians of the imperial epoch. His admiration for those of the republican epoch. What he purposes to do himself.

Tacitus has nowhere said in what manner he conceived of history, whether it were quite like his predecessors', or whether he had different views. It seems to me, however, that a glimpse of it is to be caught in the prologues which he prefixed to his two great works. Although the sense has not always seemed very clear, and there has been discussion on the significance of certain passages, it is unquestionable that he displays great severity to the historians of the imperial epoch and great favour to those of the Republic. Is not this by way of indicating his programme in advance, and can it not be said that in giving us his reasons for blaming some and approving others, he in a manner announces what he himself would fain avoid and what he proposes to do?

For him the decline of Roman letters has set in with the establishment of the Empire. 'Since the battle of Actium,' he says in the prologue to the *History*, 'the men of great genius have disappeared.' This phrase, I think, must be interpreted with some little freedom. If taken literally we should have to exclude Livy from the roll of great historians, since he only published the first books of his work some years after the victory of Augustus. That is certainly not the intention of Tacitus, who elsewhere makes so high a eulogy of Livy; also, to leave no doubt on his real opinion, he later, in the prologue to the *Annals*, slightly extends the period first decided on, and makes the decline not commence until the

advent of Tiberius. It is, then, only from that epoch onwards that he condemns those who have written books of history.

But it must be pointed out that henceforth he makes no distinctions between them. There happened to be some of their number who were mentioned with esteem and enjoyed a certain celebrity; he treats them no better than the others; all are comprehended in the same condemnation.

With what does he reproach them? With the gravest offence an historian can commit: they are not heedful enough of the truth. 'During the lifetime of wicked princes they lie out of fear; on the morrow of their death they lie out of hatred.' They pass, according to circumstances, from cowardly indulgence to the most violent attacks. The latter appear to Tacitus particularly dangerous, 'for we distrust flatterers, whilst we are inclined to believe those who talk ill of people.' As for himself, though well aware 'that there is nothing easier than to assume by malignity a deceptive air of independence,' he promises to be on his guard against it, and more especially on this point he accounts himself different from the other historians of the Empire.

It is less easy to understand the reason for the praises he bestows on those of the Republic. They had long been neglected, but public opinion was then beginning to do them more justice; a reaction had set in against that school of moderns whose principles are supported by Aper in the *Dialogue of the Orators*. Not only had Cicero been rehabilitated, but there was a desire to go back to Cato and the Gracchi; there were even people who put Lucilius above Horace, and read the poem of Lucretius with more pleasure than that of Virgil,[1] pending the *Annals* of Ennius being preferred to them both. I do not believe that Tacitus approved these exaggerations; yet we see that he had great esteem for the ancient historians of Rome. They gratified him by the knowledge they had of public affairs, by their freedom, their independence, their sincerity. It is probable also that their simple and unpolished style of expression did not grate on him; he must have thought

[1] *Dial.* 23.

of them what, about the same time, Quintilian said of the writers of the republican epoch: 'It is thither we must go for honesty and manliness of language, since, even in our style, we have let ourselves be seduced by a kind of corruption.'[1]

It is true that, in treating these historians with so much favour, he sets himself in direct contradiction with Cicero, who, as we have just seen, was hostile to them. But in reality Cicero had but one reproach for them: he thought them lacking in the characteristic qualities of the orator. It was a capital defect for one who defined history as *opus oratorium maxime*; we who are less enamoured of rhetoric, and consider it sometimes fills too large a place in the historians of antiquity, would probably be less severe on such of them as were only guilty of having neglected it a little. When Cicero says 'that they report the facts without seeking to embellish them,' it is a reproach he makes them; from us it would be praise. I believe, then, that, feeling as we do, we should have great pleasure in knowing well-informed historians, who related what they had done or seen done, and had no other aim than to relate it exactly. We should be highly interested to possess the pages in which old Fabius Pictor described those terrific battles with the Carthaginians, at which he had been present; to read the account of the conversations of Cincius Alimentus with Hannibal, whose prisoner he was; or what Sempronius Asellio said of Scipio Æmilianus, under whom he served at Numantia. In those works we should perhaps find more gratification than in histories of more elegant form and more oratorical style.

Can we not surmise that Tacitus had for those old writers the same feelings as ourselves, since he puts no reserve in the applause he gives them? Seeing that the charge brought against them, probably quite justly, of lacking eloquence and ability to adorn their narratives, has not deterred him from showing so high an esteem for them, it seems to me we have a right to conclude that this defect did not appear to him so serious as to Cicero, and that, consequently, he gave attention to oratorical art a lower place than

[1] *Quint.* i. 8, 9.

the latter in his programme for the historian. This is surprising in a writer, sometimes accused, and not unjustly, of having in some small measure abused rhetoric, but the same conclusion results from a passage in the *Agricola*, which at first sight reads rather curiously. Here he ranges Livy side by side with Fabius Rusticus, who lived under Nero, and calls them 'the most eloquent historians of Rome, the one among the ancients, the other among the moderns.'[1] One is amazed that, after such high praise, he does not feel constrained to exempt Fabius from the censure he inflicts on those who wrote history under the Empire, and accord him amongst them a place apart. Must we believe him in flagrant contradiction with himself, as he is usually accused of being? Is it not rather that in proclaiming Fabius the most eloquent of the historians of his epoch, he does not mean that he was an accomplished historian because of that, and that eloquence does not seem to him the sole, nor even perhaps the most material, quality for writing history? Just so, in the same passage of the *Agricola*, he has used the word eloquence in a way that gives cause for reflection. It is at the point where he begins his description of Britain. He points out that former writers, without any knowledge of the country, have extricated themselves by fine language, but that he, for his part, counts on replacing eloquence by the truth: *quæ priores eloquentia percoluere rerum fide tradentur.* In this phrase there certainly seems a fine ironical point at the expense of those who are only concerned with putting things effectively, and think it at need a substitute for accuracy of detail, and all-sufficing. This view was not his, and it is not rash to conclude that he had no intention, in his own work, of giving those external qualities of form more importance than they deserved.

I believe, therefore, if I have interpreted the thought of Tacitus aright in these few observations from his prologues, that the preference he accords to the historians of the republican epoch, so serious, so full of manly qualities, so versed in public affairs, so foreign to all oratorical artifice, and his severity to those of the Empire, who,

[1] *Agric.* 10.

for the delectation of a society of refined dilettanti, have made too great a sacrifice to the charms of composition and language, who, come in a time when truth is hard to discover and perilous to tell, have too laxly substituted other merits, permit us to believe that, at the moment of commencing upon his earliest works, he had in mind the conception of a simple, serious, and candid history, which would more especially derive its interest from its authenticity of information, and would owe less to beauty of form than to solidity of substance.

Such, I believe, was what he aimed at. Is it really what he achieved?

III

The sincerity of Tacitus. Sources available to him for the history of the Emperors. The proceedings of the Senate. The Journal of Rome. What use he made of them.

The first merit which he claims for himself, and of which he is proudest, is to love truth and tell it. He everywhere makes a profession of seeking it, he promises impartial setting forth, and he pledges himself to speak of all things and all men without favour and without anger (*sine ira et studio*). Many others have made the same promises and failed to keep them; but it seems to me that in his case we have less need for anxiety, and that there is an honest man's accent in his writings which inspires confidence. Undoubtedly he has not avoided the failings of his time; he has been guilty of errors in method, he has possibly had lapses of memory and involuntary prejudices; he has at times been self-deceived; but none has the right to suppose he has ever wished to deceive us. Such, as a matter of fact, is the opinion of him generally held; only some who, in principle at least, do homage to his sincerity, without openly contesting it, do not always sufficiently appreciate it in application and detail, and treat it in a free and easy manner. For my part, when his assertions are plain and precise; when, for example, he tells of what he has done

to inform himself, of the works he has consulted and of what he has learnt from them, I hold that he must be believed. If he says that he has taken the facts he records from the historians (*invenio, reperio apud auctores*), I take it that he actually has found them there; if he asserts that on this particular occasion he has consulted a certain number of them (*quidam, alii, plerique*), I do not believe it can be alleged, as is done, that this may be a plural of emphasis, a rhetorician's exaggeration, and that in reality he has had but one author under his eyes. To take his assertions for granted when he speaks of things he has seen and done, and to read them literally, appears to me to be the one means, in the study of the sources used by him, to arrive at a result.

When we read his books in this spirit, we soon perceive that he is the ancient historian who most often cites the authors and documents he has consulted. He does not do so out of a kind of erudition run mad, as so often is done nowadays to make a show of being better informed than other people, since, as we have seen, no one then deemed it any merit in an author, and since consequently he could reap no glory therefrom. Perhaps he believed himself bound to a more rigorous accuracy, because his books treated of persons who had left sons or grandsons, and of contemporary events still the theme of spirited controversy. Thus is explained the necessity he feels of fortifying himself better with facts, and more often quoting his proofs than his predecessors have done.[1]

This is not to say that he has done so as much as we could have desired; we find him still using, far too amply, the licence accorded the historians of his age. We have much ado to be satisfied with those vague indications by which he denotes the authors whose authority he invokes (*alii, plerique*); we should feel better assured if he gave us their names, and if he told us that, before quoting them, he had investigated the value of their

[1] Ladewig points out that, as a matter of fact, these citations become more numerous from Nero's epoch onward, that is to say, in measure as Tacitus approaches nearer to his own time.

evidence; however, he does quote them, which is something, and it is right to give him the credit of it.

For any one desirous of writing the history of the Roman Emperors material was not lacking. There were first the official documents. I do not mean those which were secure under lock and key in the imperial archives and contained State secrets. That was the case of what were called *commentarii principales*, a kind of memoirs or journals which the Emperors kept for themselves alone, and which could scarcely be left at every one's disposal. Tiberius wrote some which Domitian made his every-day reading; there were also others by Claudius. On the accession of Galba, some one having asked that the Senate should be allowed to examine those of Nero, so that it might know who were the persons who had offered their good offices to the prince to denounce the innocent, permission was refused.[1] But in default of those there were the proceedings of the sittings of the Senate (*Acta Senatus*), on which at the moment converged all the affairs of the Empire. 'They comprised,' says M. Fabia, 'with the official statement by the president of the question under deliberation, and the decision taken by the assembly, an analysis of the views advanced by the different members who had profited by their turn to speak, the speeches and letters of the Emperors, and the acclamations of which they had been the object. If this was obviously not quite equivalent to our shorthand report, it was more than our analytic summary.'[2] Since Augustus they had been kept secret, but men of standing like Tacitus must have obtained a sight of them without too much trouble, and, in point of fact, he has expressly quoted them (*reperio in commentariis Senatus*). Moreover, what was most important, what the public had most interest in knowing—the laws, the decrees, the prince's speeches, and a summary of the sittings of the Senate, passed current in the *Journal of Rome* (*Acta diurna populi romani*), and this journal was at everybody's disposal; not only could it be read in the places where it was posted up, but it was copied, despatched

[1] *Hist.* iv. 40.

[2] F. Fabia, *Les Sources de Tacite*, p. 312.

to the provinces, and preserved in public and private libraries.[1] It was therefore easy to consult, and, at the time when Tacitus lived, people were apparently beginning to appreciate better the services it could render. Even at the end of the first century a learned grammarian, Asconius Pedianus, had greatly profited by it for the interpretation of Cicero's discourses; later, under Vespasian, a general and statesman who also happened to be a great virtuoso, Mucianus, collected from libraries all the old things of the kind, and out of them made eleven books of ancient journals and three of letters, which he presented to the public. What would we not give for their having been preserved!

There is no doubt that Tacitus occasionally made use of those official documents. He quotes the *Acta Senatus* and the *Acta diurna populi romani* at least once each, and it is probable that he consulted them more frequently than he has been pleased to say. They unquestionably were the source whence he drew those speeches by princes, of which he reproduces a few passages, or which he simply mentions.[2] Perhaps also he had them before him when he recounted in some detail the assemblies of the Senate, and reported the opinions maintained by each speaker.[3] But as he does not think it worth while to specify what he has borrowed, it is difficult to know precisely the extent to which he drew upon them. Those who think he made more use of them than is generally supposed depend on a passage in the letters of the younger Pliny, which certainly appears to confirm their view. Pliny, who was anxious to be talked of by posterity, relates to Tacitus a quarrel he has had in the time of Domitian with an influential informer, so that he may insert it in his *History*; then, the story ended, he almost apologises for having told it. 'I am quite sure,' he says to him, 'that it would not have escaped your

[1] See later the study entitled *The Journal of Rome*.

[2] I only speak here of the speeches which he says he quotes verbatim, and not of those he has attributed to the princes.

[3] *Ann.* ii. 33, 35; iii. 55. It is very possible that when he abridged or re-wrote Piso's letter to Tiberius (*Ann.* iii. 16), he may have had the original before him, since he adds: *de Plancina nihil addidit.*

conscientious researches, since it is in the public Acts.'[1] He has therefore no doubt that Tacitus scrupulously ransacks the *Acta publica* and profits from all he discovers therein.

But if it be probable that Tacitus consulted the official documents more than was usual in his time, and that his readers did not insist upon it, we must certainly admit that he did not avail himself of them so much as we should wish. The motive which deterred him is easy to understand when we know him. He did not share the taste of Mucianus and ourselves for the journals, and I shall later have occasion to point out that the *Acta diurna* of Rome seemed to him full of idle tales repugnant to his gravity. The proceedings of the Senate (*Acta Senatus*) satisfied him no better; they were drawn up by an imperial functionary, carefully chosen from among the most zealous, who only put into them what was desired, expressed as desired; it was not in them that truth could be sought. They were full of base flatteries of the worst princes; they contained gross falsehoods concerning sham victories and bogus conspiracies, disgraceful eulogies of freedmen and informers, scandalous charges against the most honourable men; and Tacitus must have found it hard to stomach the perusal. He was wrong, of course: from out of that rubbish heap a judicious historian could have extracted useful material, more assured dates, more exact details, and it is regrettable that he did not make greater efforts to overcome his repugnance.

IV

How Tacitus used the historians preceding him. Is it true that he selected one alone of them and faithfully reproduced him? Nissen's law. What we must think. Timidity of Tacitus when confronted with conflicting evidence. His contradictions.

Although Tacitus may have very severely handled those who before him had written the history of the Empire, he made great use of them, and does not conceal it. As they were contemporaries

[1] Pliny, *Epist.* vii. 33.

of the events they related, there was information to be found in their works which could not possibly be neglected. But in what manner and to what extent he used them is a question which has been much discussed in our own days, and is none the clearer for it.

Among the attempted solutions there is one more sweeping than the others, which, by its very audacity and the bold affirmation with which it has been maintained, has enjoyed somewhat great credit. It consists in saying that the ancient historians, when they took up a subject already dealt with, felt under no compulsion to repeat labour done once and for all; that they did not go back to the first sources but were satisfied to choose among their predecessors the one most to their taste, and that, once the choice made, they stuck to him, submitting to follow him step by step, and content to adorn his narrations with the graces of their own style. We are told that this way of proceeding was not merely a bad habit, to which the public shut its eyes out of indulgence to indolent authors, but that it was a universally accepted method, to which the historian was apparently bound to submit, so deeply was it engrained in common use: this is a law, Nissen's law as it is called, from its first formulator. The law, about which nobody in antiquity spoke a word, leaves me very sceptical. I note that it is much less applicable at Rome than elsewhere. The Roman is a compiler by nature; whatever he undertakes, he equips himself with the auxiliaries of Greek science, he carefully reads all that has been written before him, he does not grumble at the trouble, he takes his material from all quarters, and, far from dissimulating it, glories in his minute study. Quintilian relates how, before writing his book on the education of orators, he spent two years in reading the authors who had treated of the same subject, and who, he says, are innumerable. The elder Pliny is very proud of giving us, in his *Natural History*, twenty thousand important facts, 'which he has accumulated from the reading of nearly two thousand volumes.' Is it credible that, in the case of history alone, the Romans

should have followed another method? What reason had they to forswear their ordinary habits of work, and make it a law for the historian to select a single authority and never deviate from him?

Nissen's law has been applied in all its rigour to Tacitus:[1] it is an understood thing that he has exactly reproduced one of his predecessors. There is discussion on the name of this historian: some would have him to be Cluvius Rufus, others the elder Pliny; but all are agreed in maintaining that, whoever he may be, Tacitus has absolutely enslaved himself to him; that he not only borrows from him without any change the details of the narrative, but even those general ideas which to us seem characteristic of his manner. His originality is then to be limited to giving his borrowings a more vivid expression, to interposing from time to time better turned phrases, words of finer sound, which is a schoolboy's task and not the work of an author. What idea do we form of Tacitus, and how can we understand the success of his books from the first day with people who could read those which had served him as models, and see how little he had added to them?

Again, we might understand his putting himself under the exclusive tutelage of one of his predecessors had he had a particular preference for him; but we have seen that he held them in very light esteem and exempted none from his attacks. Are we to detect a dexterous strategy in this severity of his, and to believe that the reproaches he addresses them are but to dissimulate his own indebtedness to them? This would be a proceeding little worthy of Tacitus, and there was moreover no need of recourse to it, since the argument is that this manner of reproducing former works was accepted by everybody. Let us remark finally that it is not exactly for their style of writing that he condemns them; there is even one of their number whom he calls very eloquent. What he censures in them is less the form than

[1] M. Fabia in his book *Les Sources de Tacite*, crowned by the Académie des Inscriptions, has been amongst ourselves the champion of Nissen's theory; he has not convinced me, and I really think that this paradox, alike in Germany as in France, is now in great measure given up. But M. Fabia's work is, none the less, very ingeniously written, and teaches us much of Tacitus.

the substance; it is impossible, then, that he could have believed he ought to borrow the very substance of their narratives and rest content with amending the form.

Let us leave these hypotheses, and, to escape from the difficulty, let us address ourselves directly to Tacitus himself; we have just noted that the surest means is to rely on his own testimony. Now, his testimony on the present matter is explicit. Everywhere he affirms that he has consulted several different authors (*secutus plurimos auctorum—celeberrimos auctores habeo—tradunt hujus temporis auctores—sunt qui ferant; alii perhibent*, etc.), he even provides for cases in which these authors do not agree among themselves, which would scarce have embarrassed him, had he followed one alone; and he tells us how he thinks he must proceed on such an occasion. 'I follow them without mentioning them by name,' he says, 'if they agree; if they differ, I record the facts under their names.'[1] This rule is not perhaps the best, and what is more, Tacitus, whatever he may say, has not invariably conformed to it; but at least it proves that, before writing, he compared several authorities together. We even find that he was not satisfied with consulting the most eminent; from those usually left unread he obtained little-known details by which he profited. With reference to one point concerning the widow of Germanicus, he tells us 'that it is not mentioned by the other historians, and that he has lighted on it in the memoirs of Agrippina, mother of the Emperor Nero.'[2] If he discovered it there, it was because he had been there to seek it. He is proud of such finds, of which some are curious indeed, and takes great honour for them. ['I have had the good luck,' he says, 'to meet with many things worth knowing which others had left in silence and oblivion.'[3] Is this the tone of a man to whom facts are indifferent, and who is only vain of his style?]

Not only do I think that when Tacitus tells us that he has had several writers before him, he must be believed because he says so, but it seems to me there are possibly no other historical books

[1] *Ann.* xiii. 20. [2] *Ibid.* iv. 53. [3] *Ibid.* vi. 7.

in which we are more conscious of a variety of sources than his. It is not enough to say that we catch glimpses of it from one page to another, it is sometimes perceptible in a single phrase. At the beginning of the *Annals*, to explain the hesitant, embarrassed demeanour of Tiberius, who dared not accept the power offered him by the Senate, though dying with desire of it, Tacitus supposes that he wished to be begged and entreated 'so as to have the appearance of having been summoned and elected by the Republic, rather than of having crept in by a wife's intrigues and a dotard's adoption.' Here he seems to follow an historian, either favourable to Tiberius or at least quite cognisant of that depth of pride which he inherited from his ancestors, the Claudii. But abruptly the tone changes. 'In the result,' he adds, 'it was perceived that his feigned irresolution had had another motive; he had wanted to read the hearts of the nobles to the very bottom, no doubt in order to avenge himself on them later; such a conjecture can only come from some enemy of the prince, who has collected society's malicious gossip about him. This habit of gathering his information from all quarters was not without danger to Tacitus; it laid him open to self-contradiction. Such notably befell him in the famous passage where he speaks of the Jews.[1] On the testimony of the historians of Antiochus Epiphanes, who claim that he saw in the Temple of Jerusalem an ass's head of gold, he states as a positive fact that 'the Jews have consecrated the image of that animal in their sanctuary'; but, a little further on, having read that Pompey, when he in his turn visited the place, found it quite empty, he concludes with the same assurance that 'the Jews tolerate no statue in their towns and still less in their temples.' Of these two conflicting statements one had to be sacrificed; apparently Tacitus had not the courage to do so.[2] With

[1] *Hist.* v. 2-8.

[2] There are other contradictions in Tacitus, not only between one work and another, which can be explained by the discovery of new documents, but occurring in the same work. Such are those which elude his vigilance on the subject of Tiberius; for example, when after telling us 'neither he nor the informers rested from denouncing' (*Ann.* iii. 38), he asserts two years later that it was in that year that the government of Tiberius began to grow corrupt (iv. 6); or else when, after

respect to this, I note that the idea formed of him is not always very just. On the ground of a few external signs he is held to be inflexible, peremptory, positive in assertion; I should rather be tempted to believe him slightly hesitant and timid. Had I a reproach to make, it would not be his having stuck exclusively to one of the preceding historians, but of his occasional inability to choose between them, or his having wished to use them all, even when they were not in agreement. One is conscious of his difficulty in deciding between contrary opinions; they seem to trouble him, and once even it befalls him, in a case of conflicting authorities of this kind, to despair of ascertaining the truth and sorrowfully declare that, in spite of all, the greatest events remain dubious: *adeo maxima quaeque ambigua sunt!*

V

The evidence of contemporaries. Use made of it by Tacitus. Anecdotes and table-talk current in society. What Tacitus thinks of them. Why has he so indulgently reported them? His efforts to ascertain and tell the truth.

To the sources on which Tacitus drew for the composition of his historical works, it is necessary to add another of scarcely less importance.

showing how he was jealous of his sons' popularity, and especially dreaded the ascendency exercised over the armies by Germanicus, he tells us that Tiberius believed himself the more secure because his two sons commanded the legions (ii. 44). These are perhaps the contradictions with which Tacitus has been most bitterly reproached, for no Emperor has found more zealous defenders than Tiberius. They are certainly provoking; but perhaps they may be attributed in part to the very character of the prince. He was fanciful and changeable, and took no pride in being consistent; he would not brook contradiction, and at the same time was disgusted with servility (ii. 87); he sometimes rejoiced to see the Senate manifest some independence (ii. 51), but more often it happened that he punished it. Tacitus says that in the trial of Lepida he changed his language and attitude so frequently that it is impossible to know what his intentions really were (iii. 22). I think, however, that in the majority of cases, the diversities in narrative or judgment to be found in Tacitus are mainly due to the variance of the historians he consulted. He himself makes a somewhat naïve confession of the sort of bondage in which he has put himself to his predecessors, and of the scruples he feels against passing over silently a fact recorded by one of them, when he says, referring to a detail of Piso's conspiracy: 'I have no wish to suppress it, though to me it seems absurd' (*Ann.* xv. 53).

Let us remember he was not in the position of Livy, who, for the greater part of his work, went back to the very remote periods, and could only acquaint himself with them by recourse to ancient annalists. Tacitus was contemporary with most of the affairs he recounts, and was only divided from those he had not personally witnessed by one generation. The early years of the Empire were so crowded with tragical events, so many princes swiftly followed one upon another, that we rather lose the sense of time in their study. It is somewhat difficult to realise that between the accession of Tiberius and the death of Nero but fifty-four years elapsed. One of the characters in the *Dialogue of the Orators*, to undermine the respect observed to the writers of the great age, points out that those so-called ancients are much less so than is imagined, and that, for example, at the last distribution to the people by the Emperor Vespasian, several old men presented themselves, on whom Augustus had twice or thrice conferred the same largesses.[1] Tacitus was fourteen or fifteen when Nero was replaced by Galba; he was therefore the witness, and the very wide-awake witness, of all that he records in the first of his great works. As for the events which fill the *Annals*, if not himself a spectator, he could know people who had seen them; he talked in his youth with survivors of the epoch of Tiberius; he sat in the Senate by the side of Silius Italicus, of Virginius Rufus, and of many others who had made their whole career under Claudius and under Nero; curious as he was, he must have got them to speak, and he did not forget what they told him. On several occasions he adduces their evidence: 'I have heard old men say; I repeat what old men have told me; it is thus that speak the people of that time who have lived on to our own.'[2]

What these greybeards told was, with what they had seen themselves and what was useful to know, what they had heard tell—many dubious anecdotes, conjectures, inventions, and all the malicious rumours which float about the world and find credit, especially when there is a desire to repress people from talking.

[1] *Dial.* 17. [2] *Ann.* xi. 27; iii. 16.

Such stories ran no risk of being lost; those they had amused kept them in mind and repeated them with new details. It was a piece of luck to hear them told by some witty talker, like that Pedo Albinovanus, whom Seneca calls *fabulator elegantissimus*, and they were the life of conversation in those societies of idlers, who were the more willing to find entertainment in the past, since it was dangerous to speak of the present, and since flings at defunct Emperors always recoiled a little on the living prince. Thus, side by side with the official history of the Empire, there was another which could be called that of the fashionable world, the body of which was composed of some truths and many slanders. As a rule these tales did not agree in their versions of the same matter, and it seems as though Tacitus may have wished to set one against the other and show their discrepancy in that passage where, after relating an important event 'according to most authors and those worthiest of confidence,' he adds: 'Nevertheless I cannot pass over a rumour, so well substantiated then that it has not yet lost all credence.'[1] Such rumours, which he denotes under the name of *fama*, *rumor*, often recur in his narratives; even those of the more remote epoch of Augustus and Tiberius had not died out; they retained enough authority to impose on the historians.

Sometimes Tacitus simply mentions them without our knowing whether he approves or condemns them. Speaking of the grandchildren of Augustus, who perished so soon and so young, he is content to say 'that their end was hastened by destiny or by the crime of Livia.'[2] A little further on, when Augustus dies in his turn at the age of seventy-seven, which seems a sufficient explanation of his decease, he nevertheless adds: 'Some suspicions fell upon his wife.'[3] But usually he is less undecided. In the case of an indifferently honest piece of caution, gratuitously ascribed to Tiberius, he avows, though ill-disposed to that prince, that he finds it hard to believe (*non crediderim*).[4] On another occasion when a still graver charge is brought against the Emperor, he declares

[1] *Ann.* iv. 10. [2] *Ibid.* i. 3. [3] *Ibid.* i. 5. [4] *Ibid.* i. 76.

it quite unreasonable.[1] He is very well aware what gives fictions of this kind their credit, and how imaginations, when excited by great events, have a strong craving to deck them out with marvellous circumstances. He is anxious to put his readers on their guard against malice, 'which distorts the most genuine facts,' and credulity, 'which welcomes the least founded rumours.'

But if he mistrusts them, he reports them; and they even occur so frequently in his writings that they have largely contributed to give the latter that apparent systematic disparagement of the imperial authority, with which they have been censured. Why, then, has he accorded them so large a place? It has been called an indulgent concession to the people of his own class, to whom those malicious tales must have been highly agreeable. Assuredly he had to study how to please them. Even in the case of a great writer, such as he, labouring for the whole world, there is always, whatever he may do, a small circle of select readers whom he is specially anxious to satisfy, and on whom he more directly traces the effect of his books. But these men of intellect were not the only readers who delighted in the stories and liked their repetition. They were everywhere diffused, even competing in a manner with serious history, to such a degree that Tacitus seems afraid lest the popularity they enjoy should impair the success of his own works. He feels the necessity of beseeching the readers into whose hands shall fall what he nobly calls the fruit of his labours (*cura nostra*), 'not to prefer to ascertained facts, unperverted by love of the marvellous, the romantic fictions so greedily swallowed by the public.'[2] It is because they are so popular that, despite the suspicion with which they inspire him and which he does not hide, he has not ventured to suppress them entirely. Finally, it is possible that we may have here an effect of the indecision of mind usual with him between accounts of varying character and importance. Or again, he may in this case have yielded to the necessity, just mentioned, of telling all he knows; so that this somewhat fumbling scrupulosity, loth to sacrifice aught of what has come

[1] *Ann.* iv. 20. [2] *Ibid.* iv. 11.

to his knowledge, would really be a proof the more of his desire to investigate and tell the whole truth.

Finally, then, I believe that to reach the truth he has taken a great deal more trouble than is supposed, and it seems to me that all just said is a sufficient proof of it. He has not neglected the official documents to the extent alleged, and at all events has made more use of them than was generally done in his time. He has studied the historians nearer than himself to the events he would describe; and he has not concentrated his attention on one alone, as we are told to believe, but has compared them together. He has induced the survivors of past epochs to speak out, and, when none remained, he has collected what of their reminiscences was stored in the memory of those who had heard them. Here we have, in principle at least, just what is essential, and what we recommend to those who write history. The difference between Tacitus and ourselves is that, as a rule, he does so without saying anything about it. Nowadays we like to parade the precautions we take to be well-informed, or, as we say, well-documented. Tacitus has not always this solicitude, or, if you will, vanity. Sometimes, however, he is less reticent and affords us a glimpse of the pains he has taken to make no assumptions lightly. I select as an instance a matter, not in itself of great moment, on which, nevertheless, he was bent only on telling the exact truth. It is reported that Agrippina, who felt her son slipping through her fingers, was ready for anything, even for incest, to hold him.[1] It is so monstrous a detail, that Tacitus is unwilling for assert it save on the authority of all the contemporary historians. Now those historians are not quite in agreement: while Fabius attributes the idea of the crime to Nero, Cluvius accuses Agrippina of it. To ascertain which of the two is in the right, Tacitus consults writers of less standing (*ceteri auctores*), and even public gossip (*fama huc inclinat*). This inquiry leads him to suppose that it was indeed Agrippina who was guilty, as Cluvius said; and probability is on this point quite in accord with truth: 'Such an

[1] *Ann.* xiv. 2.

abomination well became her who, from ambition, had prostituted her youth to Lepidus, and whom the same passion cast later into the arms of the freedman Pallas.'

In this passage Tacitus lets us clearly see the efforts he has made to unravel the truth from conflicting statements. I quite believe that elsewhere, without mentioning it, he has proceeded in the same manner, and it is in this matter, above all, that he prides himself on excelling the historians of the Empire, who did not always take the same trouble.

VI

The artist in Tacitus. The Romans' taste for dramatic scenes. How Tacitus sought too much to gratify it. Rhetoric in Tacitus. Why he did not reproduce the actual speeches. The speeches he ascribes to his personages. Contradictory disputations. The character he gives them. Memories of school exercises.

By applauding in his prologues the historians of the Republic, Tacitus seemed to take it upon him to imitate them. It was the second part of his programme; it was also the harder to carry out. The age was too old, too corrupted, too enamoured of literature and refined civilisation, for simplicity to be easy of recovery. Cicero's formula 'that history is an orator's work' had imposed itself on all the historians; it had become the law of the genre as of nearly all other genres. We have seen that, taken in its broadest sense, it can simply imply 'that history must be the work of an artist,' which means that it is not enough to report the facts accurately, to put them in order one with another as they have occurred; but that there must be ability to interest the reader, to deal with those facts in such a way as to make him grasp their significance and importance, and, by the manner of their presentation, to breathe life into events and men. This interpretation of Cicero's precept must have perfectly suited Tacitus, who was by nature a marvellous artist. Racine calls him 'the greatest painter of antiquity,' and some of the pictures he left are among the finest surviving to us from ancient authors.

It is needless to recall them here; all scholars are familiar with them. And since it was his talent to depict great scenes, it was natural that it should be to his taste. He sought occasions for it,[1] and it is quite perceptible how happy he was to find them. It has been remarked, for instance, that he does not seem altogether at ease when he has some military operation to relate, and, since what is not done heartily is done ill, his accounts of warfare occasionally leave something to desire. Professional men charge him with defective information of the topography, the numbers of the combatants, the distribution of the troops, the phases of the struggle; but let some novel and curious episode supervene, which lends itself to description, as at Idisiavisus, the Long Bridges, and the night conflict before Cremona, and at once his animation revives and the narrative is again brisk, interesting, and full of colour.

Those who are tempted to consider that, at moments, there is in those fine passages a little too much art and even artifice, a too obvious preoccupation with effect, some excess of theatrical setting, must not forget that Tacitus is presenting in action and speech his fellow-countrymen, to whom great emotional demonstrations were natural, and who readily displayed them. We are surprised, for example, that he should show us generals, in order to disarm their mutinous soldiers, 'rolling at their feet in the dust, rending their garments, their countenance streaming with tears, their breast choked with sobs';[2] but is there not something of this expressive gesticulation in the picture, so sober nevertheless, which Suetonius gives of Cæsar at the moment when he is about to cross the Rubicon?[3] He represents him, while addressing the cohort that follows him, 'unable to withhold himself from weeping and tearing his raiment.' The great scene of Lepida, who, to save herself from a capital accusation, goes to the theatre whilst

[1] It is thus that in the case of the death of Cremutius Cordus (*Ann.* iv. 34), he has preferred to Seneca's account, which must be the true one, another which allows him to represent Cremutius appearing before the Senate and delivering to it an admirable discourse.

[2] *Hist.* iii. 10.

[3] Suetonius, *Cæsar*, 33.

the games are in progress, 'accompanied by women of the highest rank; and there, calling on the names of her ancestors with pitiful wailing, excites so profound an emotion, that the spectators burst into tears and hurl their curses on her accuser,'[1] seems less extraordinary when we recall what was taking place every day in the courts, where the advocates, to touch the judges with compassion, brought in little children in tears, displayed their clients in mourning attire, covered with dust, and, when they had been soldiers, tore off their tunics, when the peroration was reached, to show their wounds. Obviously we must take account of such usages and such a temperament when we read Tacitus. It may be that what grates on us, what, with our more sober humour less prone to noisy outbursts, we deem exaggerated and bombastic, is founded on the most exact reality. Nevertheless I admit that there are passages in some of his best known narrations, which it is hard to defend. He has occasionally yielded to the taste of the time, which he shared himself, and given the description too theatrical a turn. We meet in him with regular soliloquies that would not be out of place in an acting play. Otho, for example, when Piso's adoption has bereft him of all hope of reigning, talks with himself in justification of conspiring against Galba, and he talks as if there ought to be an audience. He retails brilliant reflections, balanced phrases, more for the public's benefit than his own: 'Death is the lot of all men; what makes some distinction between them is that it is either followed by oblivion or glory. If all must alike perish, whether innocent or guilty, there is more courage in deserving our destiny.'[2] It is a soliloquy also, and one of the same character, that Tacitus attributes to Vespasian, when he hesitates to take the Empire and calculates the perils to which he is going to expose himself.[3] Assuredly the reasons which the two men give themselves are appropriate, they may be presumed to have occurred to them; but who has heard them spoken? Who could have heard them? Tacitus puts in his characters' mouths, not the words they really uttered, but

[1] *Ann.* iii. 23. [2] *Hist.* i. 21. [3] *Ibid.* ii. 74.

those they ought to have used; he has substituted probability for truth, which, according to Aristotle, is a purely rhetorical practice.

There is rhetoric in Tacitus then; it is undeniable. His was, before all, an orator's nature; he has the sonorous voice, the ample gesture, the taste for pathos and impressive effects; he readily employs brilliant epigrams, he loves 'those sayings that overcharge things.' We have just noted that rhetoric is often to be found in his narrative; there is naturally still more in the orations, which, following the usage of his time, he ascribes to his personages; there it is more in place.

If the ancient historians are to be blamed for having inserted discourses of this nature in their works, against Tacitus especially must the charge be brought, for he was the one man among them who could most easily have refrained. Livy possessed no authentic oration of Brutus or Camillus;[1] if he wished to give them voice, he had indeed to invent what he made them say. Tacitus was not reduced to the same necessity. When he represented the Emperors speaking on important occasions, he could have given us those they actually delivered, instead of making them hold forth in speeches of his own composition. They had often been preserved, and Tacitus was not ignorant of where they could be found; *exstat oratio*, he once tells us of a speech of Tiberius, and, instead of reproducing it, which was easy for him to do, he is content to summarise it.[2] There were, moreover, cases in which it was of the highest importance to transcribe the text itself without any change. The letter which Piso wrote to Tiberius before killing himself, and which the Emperor read to the Senate, would have better enlightened us on the death of Germanicus than the somewhat vague analysis made by Tacitus.

[1] The Roman orators were not in the habit of writing their speeches in advance and then reciting them. If they wrote them out at all, it was after their delivery, and sometimes considerably after. Cato did not commit his to writing till the end of his life, and Cicero often delayed several years. We therefore possess no authentic discourse of the orators of the Republic, and we do not know for certain what Roman eloquence at that period precisely was.

[2] *Ann.* ii. 63.

Why, then, did he abstain from transcribing it? It has often been said, and I think rightly, that he shrank from it by a literary scruple. He did not wish disparities of tone in his works; unity of style appeared to him one of the most essential qualities, and he feared it might be compromised if the historian patched speeches and letters by another hand on a narrative composed in his own language. To-day we should regard this scrupulosity as exaggerated, our literary susceptibilities would be unruffled by such blendings of tone, provided our curiosity were satisfied by the production of the authentic texts. This was not the opinion of the ancients; they were less curious than we perhaps, but more artistic. Their taste had subtleties and requirements which are foreign to ours; the wounds from which they sometimes suffered, and which leave us insensible, were perhaps the condition of delicate delights that we shall never know.

Had orations been entirely banished from history, it would have appeared to an ancient that something was wanting. We know the place filled by speech in the life of the republics of antiquity. At Rome, under the Empire, it had lost its power, but it preserved all its prestige. An Emperor incapable of eloquence seemed scarce worthy to reign. Cæsar, Augustus, Tiberius were distinguished orators; Caligula did not lack facility in his lucid intervals; Claudius had good sense and some glibness when he did not try to be too clever. There was scandal, almost indignation, when it was known that Nero repeated speeches fabricated for him by Seneca. There was haranguing in the Senate, and eloquence was ever the art that therein led to all; there was haranguing in the camps, and we see that a general never undertakes an enterprise without having first made an oration to his soldiers. To depict the confusion of an army surprised by the foe, Tacitus tells us 'that he who was in command could neither harangue it nor draw it up in order of battle.'[1] The two operations are put on the same level and seem to him equally necessary. It was not, then, possible to present a picture of everyday life, which should be

[1] *Hist.* iv. 33.

complete and alive, if speeches did not occupy some space; and, so soon as it was believed impossible to use the real ones, the tendency was to invent fictitious. They are adversely criticised to-day as contrary to truth; let us not forget that it was solicitude for truth that led to their inclusion in historical works.

The orations of Tacitus scarcely vary from those of Sallust and Livy, and what is said of his qualities and defects could be repeated of theirs. There is, however, one special feature to be remarked in him: he likes to draw up counter debates, to put in conflict two antagonistic opinions, represented by two different persons, who argue them in turn. The Emperor Claudius proposes to grant the Gauls the privilege of Roman civic rights, and a senator responds to him;[1] when Nero creates the *ludi quinquennales*, two orators discuss the advantages and dangers of public games;[2] two orators also speak in succession, when the question is raised in the Senate whether it be good that the governors of the provinces should take their wives with them, or whether it were better that they left them at Rome.[3] What is very curious is that in these debates Tacitus makes one and other advocate speak so well, and takes such pains to find them all persuasive arguments, that in the end we do not know what he thinks himself and on which side he is to be ranged. Is this again a consequence of that timidity which we have already remarked, and must it be supposed that in reality he floats between divergent opinions? Or is it rather the impartiality of a noble mind, which, recognising that those great themes are susceptible of being reasoned in diverse senses, desires to leave us the liberty of our judgments?

I fear there may be another explanation and that in this matter we are confronted by a school habit which Tacitus had been unable entirely to shake off. Men remained more than we think under the spell of those scholastic exercises which to us seem so futile. Sometimes, with education completed, they could not wholly renounce them. Even as there were people amongst ourselves

[1] *Ann.* xi. 23, 24. [2] *Ibid.* xiv. 20 and 21. [3] *Ibid.* iii. 33, 34.

who went on till their death, writing Latin verses, so there were senators and ex-consuls, like Pollio and Messalla, who invited their friends from time to time to hear them declaim as they had done in their youth. Tacitus speaks lightly enough of the rhetors in the *Dialogue*, yet, for all that, he had attended their schools, and, more than he would have wished, retained their stamp. There the pupil was given a cause to defend, very often a detestable cause, sometimes the *pro* and *con* to maintain. When he had received or selected a subject, of whatever nature it might be, he no longer thought of aught save putting it in the best light. He forgot his own opinions and sympathies; he only sought to profit from all the resources the cause could afford him and thus display his cleverness. It really seems as if this frame of mind sometimes recurred in Tacitus. In the struggle which, on Vespasian's accession, put the noble Helvidius Priscus in conflict with Eprius Marcellus, the denouncer of Thrasea, there is no doubt that Tacitus is for Helvidius. But when he has to present the informer speaking, he bids his rancour be silent, and composes so skilful a pleading for him that we are ready to take his part.[1] In those scholastic contests the necessity of always having something to say led to the frequent utterance of ineptitudes. As the applause of schoolfellows was desired above all else, one chose the most striking arguments, which were not always the fairest; reasons for everything had to be found, and when no good reasons were available, one boldly offered bad. Tacitus had familiarised himself with such practices in his youth, and it seems to me that some trace of them is still to be found in his speeches. Is it not strange, for instance, that Agrippina, when accused, gravely invokes in her defence the divinity of Claudius, before people not one of whom is ignorant of what means she has employed 'to precipitate her husband into Heaven'?[2] Can we understand Poppæa, anxious to

[1] *Hist.* iv. 8. It must also be said that in doing so he conformed to the truth of the facts. Tacitus acknowledged elsewhere that in this contention the advantage had rested with the capable advocate over the somewhat blundering honesty of the sage.

[2] *Ann.* xiii. 14.

estrange Nero from his wife Octavia, accusing her before him of relations with an Egyptian flute-player, when she is well aware it is a calumny that cannot dupe Nero, since very probably they have just concocted it between them ?[1] I am tempted to believe that these singular reasonings, surprising in so sound an intellect, and that, generally speaking, all the pleasure he feels in making two adversaries debate, and debate so well that he forgets self and puts himself in their place, imagines arguments for them more showy than solid, are all a reminiscence of the time when at school he pleaded the *pro* and *con* to the applause of his masters and schoolmates. It is thus that at moments, in this dignified senator, this ex-consul nearing his fiftieth year, this severe historian, the pupil of the rhetors comes to life anew.

VII

The gravity of Tacitus. The distinction which he lays down between history and the journal. Suetonius. The new character assumed by history in the *Lives of the Cæsars*. Portraits in Tacitus. In modern historians. Nero in the *Annals* of Tacitus and in Renan's *Antéchrist*.

Gravity, perhaps the quality with which we are most impressed in reading Tacitus, is not only the product of his character. Undoubtedly he was grave by nature, but he had grown more so by the manner in which he conceived of history. It was for him, as for all those who had preceded him, a sort of practical instruction in morality. If, as he believed, it is history that teaches us what we must do and what avoid, it follows that a historian is like a spiritual director, a preacher, almost a priest. We must grasp, in reading him, that he comprehends the greatness of his mission. For example, 'he will scrupulously refrain from embroidering his narrative with tales of fabulous marvels, and from diverting his readers with fictions; that would be unbecoming the dignity of the work he has undertaken.'[2] He will not hold himself bound to report in minute detail all the events of the past.

[1] *Ann.* xiv. 61. [2] *Hist.* ii. 50.

Amongst those the tradition of which has come down to us, there are 'memorable events (*res illustres*),' from which a lesson can be drawn; they must be mentioned. As for those which we nowadays class as 'miscellaneous news (*faits divers*),' and which are merely amusing little anecdotes, Tacitus excludes them from history and contemptuously leaves them to the journals.[1] Even in the incidents he believes himself bound to relate, he suppresses particular points which seem to him too repulsive. When afraid that the proper term lacks dignity, he replaces it by a periphrasis. The Batavian Civilis, who rebelled against the Romans, had only one eye, like Hannibal and Sertorius, and he was proud to resemble them. Tacitus simply speaks of a physical disfigurement which dishonoured his visage (*oris dehonestamentum*).[2] Vitellius, at a loss where to hide, takes refuge in a little room in the Palatine, where he barricades himself with a bedstead and a mattress;[3] Tacitus calls this room an ignoble retreat (*pudenda latebra*): it was really a porter's lodge. When they have taken him thence, they drag him to the Gemoniæ, pelting his drunkard's face with mud and dung. These details seem too low for Tacitus, who eludes them with a fine phrase: 'The populace outraged him dead with the same infamy with which it had worshipped him living.'

There were persons, however, for whom such slightly vulgar anecdotes, told in sufficiently plain terms, had no terrors, and who, without perhaps daring to acknowledge it, found more entertainment in them than in the somewhat frigid solemnity of official history. We must even suppose there were many such, since a writer of merit, who had assumed an important place in literature, had the idea of satisfying them. Suetonius was a scholar who, like a true heir of Varro, had taken an all-round interest in things, and was a great reader and great note-taker, as erudite persons were in those days. But this scholar was also a wit and a man of the world; the probability is that he did not always remain shut up in his library, but on occasion left that country villa of his at the gates of Rome, a true home for a man of letters, 'quite large

[1] *Ann.* xiii. 31. [2] *Hist.* iv. 13. [3] *Hist.* iii. 84.

enough to afford a place of repose, and small enough to cause no anxiety.' Pliny's friendship seems to imply that he had access among people of distinction. He could mix in that society which freely discussed those who had played a part in the State, especially the princes and their family. Later, his intimacy with a prefect of the Prætorium procured him entrance to the Emperor Hadrian's cabinet; he was for some time his secretary, and in that capacity could read papers that were not shown to the public. As by nature he was very inquisitive, he did not neglect this opportunity of being well-informed. What he thus gathered in from all sides he remembered, and he handed it on to us in a work which has fortunately been preserved. We plainly perceive in reading the *Lives of the Cæsars*, that the author has aimed at making a work of a new order; he has avoided including what was to be found in history as it was understood before him. He has not arranged events in chronological sequence, which is a rule of the historic art; rhetoric is quite absent; political views and general reflections occupy small space; he has made no pretence of teaching. On the other hand, anecdotes abound, told simply, without any attempt at effect or pictorial treatment. We read in his pages original documents, letters especially, when they throw some light on the great man he is describing; the witticisms fathered on him and those made at his expense; the monuments he has erected or restored are enumerated, the games he has given the people, a universal passion at the time; the signs which have announced his death, for the author is very superstitious and his readers still more so; finally, we are provided with his physical portrait, in which nothing is omitted, from the dimensions of his figure to the colour of his eyes. Suetonius has no compunction in telling us without any reticence all known of his infirmities:[1] how Cæsar combed his hair over his forehead to conceal his baldness, how Claudius sputtered and jogged his head in speaking, how Domitian, who had been a very handsome lad when young, was afflicted towards the end with a huge stomach borne on thin

[1] See the manner in which he describes Vespasian. *Vesp.* 20.

legs, and only found consolation in saying, 'that there is nought more pleasing than beauty, but also nought that passes more quickly.' Here, obviously, we are at the antipodes of ancient history. It is highly probable that works of this order held no very high place in the hierarchy of literary forms drawn up by the grammarians of the time. Never would Pliny, who knew and liked them both, have committed the impropriety of putting Suetonius on a level with Tacitus. Tacitus is a great personage, a serious man, a senator, a consul, who 'graves for eternity.' Suetonius is but an advocate, a student (*scholasticus*), who wants to divert his contemporaries. And yet Suetonius has created a form which is to last so long as the Empire and he survive. History shall scarce be written henceforth save on the model he has designed; on the contrary, whilst Tacitus is always admired, he will never again be imitated. He was almost the last of the historians who wrote in the ancient fashion.

It is probable that Tacitus, at the end of his life, when enjoying the serene glory of a great and serious historian, was able to read the *Lives of the Cæsars*; and he no doubt read them with pleasure, for they recalled to his eyes periods which he had studied, persons with whom he had lived. But I do not believe, despite the success accorded the new work, that he ever regretted having understood history in another way than Suetonius. Apart from that natural taste which inclined him to dignity and grandeur, it must have seemed to him that his conception of history was more appropriate to the purpose he put before him in writing it. Certainly the anecdotes we are told of a great man, the minute portraits we are given of him, realise his figure. From them he acquires more strongly marked features, becomes more of an individual, but just by so differentiating himself from us, he tends to be a man apart. Now, if he do not resemble us in essentials, there is a risk of the profit we should derive from the story of his life being lost. No doubt we shall follow the incidents of his career with interest, but we shall imbibe no lessons from them. What, in fact, can we learn from the life of one in whom we do not recognise ourselves? On the

other hand, if he be depicted by his more general qualities, if less stress be laid on his more personal traits, if he be made more of a type and less of an individual, he thereby comes more into our everyday environment, he approaches us nearer, and we shall be more inclined to apply to ourselves the examples he affords us. In this way history becomes more moral in the sense in which Tacitus understood it.

This does not preclude the portraits which Tacitus draws from being very life-like also, although they are reduced to broad lines and scarce comprise more than the man's master qualities. A great number might be cited which are uneffaceable from the memory of people of taste. I put aside Tiberius, a very complicated personality, whom every one explains in his own way, on whom, moreover, Tacitus does not flatter himself on saying the last word, so obscure and irresolute does he find him. None the less he has admirably depicted the wickedness of his nature, his taste for tortuous paths, the tenacity of his intelligence and the meanness of his heart, his terror of every free word combined with the repulsion he felt for servility, his disdain of the whole world and of himself. He might have certainly painted a more grotesque Claudius than he has represented. Nothing would have been easier for him than to select from his speeches and letters the marks of a finished comedian. What he says suffices to give us a perfect acquaintance with that deficient creature, in whom some small measure of common sense was mingled with so much stupidity, and a basis of good-nature with a frightful cruelty. It is in the same fashion, without over-emphasis, that he presents us with Otho, Galba, Vitellius, the two Agrippinas, Poppæa, Mucianus, Antonius Primus, a Gascon who gesticulates and is a great talker, Petronius, one of the most curious characters of the time, and those touching figures, like Piso and Octavia, whom he shows in the background, scarce emerging from the shadow. As a rule they are not those elaborate portraits in balanced antitheses to be found in Sallust, but broadly drawn sketches, a few strokes of chalk or pencil, just so much of the man as we must know to

understand the events in which he figures. The whole is coloured in a somewhat uniform tone, with nothing too prominent to distract the reader from the attention he owes the complete narrative. Tacitus is an admirable artist, ever absorbed in the unity of his work, and reluctant to let the high relief of certain details impair the harmony of the whole.

Taste has altered to-day; our writers are not so attentive to unity and harmony. We are no longer, in the same degree, so scrupulous of consistent dignity. In the most serious works we tolerate without a murmur what our forefathers would have called indiscretions and gossip. Those two orders of history which parted company in the second century of the Empire, the one maintaining its stand on the heights of oratorical relation, the other slipping into anecdote, have no longer the same mutual repugnance and even tend to unite: in Michelet, and all those who have followed him, are comprised both Tacitus and Suetonius at once. The imitation of Tacitus gives a taste for dramatic pictures, stately scenes, and general ideas; from Suetonius we adopt his realistic descriptions, his striking portraits, his picturesque details, and we blend the whole together. Of the product of this blending and of how our present method differs from that of the past I seemed to gain a clear conception when reading certain passages of the *Antéchrist*, where Renan has found inspiration in Tacitus, dressing him in the fashion of our day. There is not, properly speaking, any portrait of Nero in the later books of the *Annals*, but Tacitus sufficiently describes him by exhibiting him in action. He is the latest product of a great degenerate race; we catch a glimpse in him of some vestige of the ancient family qualities, but tainted and corrupted; he has the pride of his birth and despises the freedmen who governed the Empire under Claudius, but he lets himself be led by rakes and flatterers; he professes to disdain money, and is once on the point of suppressing at a blow all the indirect taxes; but when his expensive follies have left the treasury bare, he accuses wealthy persons of imaginary plots to have a pretext for confiscating their goods;

like the sons of great houses, he scours the streets of Rome by night, thrashes the passers-by, insults the women; but, if resisted, he remembers he is master of the world, and has those put to death who have the audacity to defend themselves; his ancestors protected literature and the arts, he carries his æsthetic taste to the point of mania, turns himself into a charioteer and buffoon; he is at once cruel and craven, he thinks and says that all is permitted him, that his power has no bounds, but, at the first murmur of the populace, he trembles in every limb and grants it all it asks. Such is Nero's character in its essentials, and it is very probable that Tacitus, in the portion of the *Annals* we have lost, made no great addition to it. In Renan the groundwork of the portrait is to be found again, with some additional details for which he has applied to Suetonius, Plutarch, and Dion Cassius. The principal features are still there, but in higher relief, especially the violent and grotesque details. He has given more prominence to his spoilt-child's caprices, his pretensions as an artist, his mountebank mania. In a picture which it is hard to forget, he has represented him during the feasts of the year 64, when young Christian maidens were given over to the beasts, wearing in his eye that concave emerald which served him as an eyeglass, parading his knowledge of sculpture at sight of those poor girls veiling their nudity with a chaste gesture, or, tossed by a bull, falling rent to fragments on the pebbles of the arena. 'He was there in the front row, on the *podium*, with his wicked face, his short sight, his blue eyes, his elaborately curled auburn hair, his obstinate lips, his bearing at once evil and foolish like that of a great baby, stupidly solemn and puffed up with vanity, whilst brazen-throated music vibrated in the air pervaded with the reek of blood.'[1]

It seems to me that in this page, compared with the writings of Tacitus, we see not only the divergence of two men of genius, but the difference between two systems.

[1] Renan, *Antichrist*, translated by W. G. Hutchison, p. 86.

VIII

What history has gained and what it has lost. The place of ancient history in the education of youth.

The fact is that we have a conception of history which is no longer quite that of the ancients. Oratorical in its form, moral in its end, it was amongst them a province of eloquence and philosophy. Ours has freed itself from that servitude; it pursues only its own fortunes, it means to live its own life. Whilst gaining in independence, it has singularly widened its domain; it has allotted a more ample place to economic, social, geographical and financial studies, etc. It has thus grown richer, broader and more varied. It has sought, above all, to be truer. The quest of truth was also, we have seen, the concern of the ancient historians, but ours have employed surer methods for its discovery; and by truth they do not merely understand the material reality of the facts they record, they claim to represent them exactly as they were, they endeavour to make men and things live again in their real character, their real colours, in such a manner as to afford us a complete illusion of the past.

This is progress, and we have cause to congratulate ourselves on it. But there is no need to exaggerate it in any way. The progress achieved is not such as to give us the right to depreciate and disdain what was done before us. It is not true to assert, as people do, that history has become an entirely new science, nor even that it is quite a science. It has perfected its methods, it has not changed its nature. It more often approximates to the truth; it has not discovered the means of invariably attaining the truth; that it will never find. It is, indeed, essential that it resign itself to being merely a hypothetical science; the methods it employs are, at bottom, those which it has always employed; I do not believe there are others. We accuse the ancient historians of being too well satisfied with probability; can ours, then, always forgo it? They are compelled to deal with the personages of the ancient dramas as they deal with the people of their own circle.

Actions are seen, motives divined. When we wish to read in a man's heart, whether a man of to-day or a man of the past, and learn what can have decided him on acting as he has done—if he does not tell us, and he hardly ever does tell us—we must needs surmise it from the ordinary motives of our actions—that is to say, we must know man and know life. We ought, then, to resign ourselves, as the ancients did, to building up the truth on the model of probability. They took less precautions than we and had less sense of proportion, I readily admit; it is a difference in degree, but not in principle.

If their history had not all the qualities on which we pride ourselves to-day, it had others, which have their value and which we no longer possess to the same extent. As to the defects, for which we sometimes censure it with much severity, they did not impair it so much as might be supposed, and it even had the good fortune of occasionally reaping some advantage therefrom.

I remark, for example, that the minute precautions which our historians take to establish their facts are not always without some drawbacks. That accumulation of references at the foot of the pages, those documentary appendices weighing down the end of the volumes, ought to be a motive for assurance; they are sometimes a cause for uneasiness. Even as the scaffoldings which support a house at once suggest the idea that it is not solid, it may perhaps be said in presence of those piles of documents, that one only troubles to defend what needs defence; and so confidence is shaken by the very efforts made to establish it. Once warned, we look more closely, and it is rare for this attentive scrutiny not to suggest to us reasons for doubt. We have awakened the critical spirit, which is a marvellous instrument of destruction, but is scarcely qualified for reconstruction; in the course of some years it has strewed history with ruins. Sagacious people tell us that if it has only demolished errors, there is not much to grumble about. They are right, no doubt, although amongst those errors there may be some whose disappearance we do not see without regret. Of all those piquant anecdotes, which were the life and joy of

history, I do not believe one remains unshaken. Great men and great events have all suffered some damage, and what is most annoying is that when the space has been cleared, no solid and upright structure is built upon it. Nothing endures of all those edifices which, with such research and toil, we essay to raise. In a short time the discovery of new documents, a better interpretation of texts, or simply a taste for novelty, transforms received opinions. This perpetual reconstruction suggests that there is nothing certain in history, and that it has ever to be re-written. There was not quite the same feeling among the ancients. People were less exacting then; they were sooner pleased. When a work was written with talent there was a disposition to welcome it without too close a scrutiny. So it happened that, being less contested, it appeared less contestable; statements made with no uncertain voice, with no argument, as if there were no need of demonstration, acquired a certain authority, stringency, finality, which more forcibly impressed the reader's memory, especially when that reader was a child. Once they were imbibed, they made themselves at home and never departed, and it was that which gave so much solidity to the lessons learned from them.

Ancient history is, no doubt, less varied, less far-reaching, less rich than ours, which is attended by a retinue of complementary sciences, but it is also less luxuriant in detail and simpler; it better presents what it specially aims at presenting, what is the chief end of its studies: man and his passions. In it he holds the foreground; there is nothing to distract us from him, nothing to mask him. We have already remarked that this manner of presentation is not quite ours. We rather insist upon the qualities by which one man differs from others, the ancients preferred to display those by which he resembles them, and only to distinguish between them by shades and degrees; we tend to individualise them more, they were readier to constitute them types. Both methods are equally legitimate, since man is twofold, since on certain sides he isolates himself in his own personality, on others mingles with those amid whom he lives, since he is at once

himself and every man. It results from the same system that, in the history of the ancients, the peoples, being mainly described by their most universal, most human qualities, have a great family resemblance to each other. That history has, we must fairly confess, an indifferent care for what we call local colour. In Tacitus the Batavian Civilis and the Briton Galgacus express themselves in the same fashion, and both speak a little like Roman generals; when he puts a speech into the mouth of King Vologeses, there is nothing to suggest to us that he is a Parthian and addressing satraps. And yet the ideas he ascribes to them are those befitting the circumstances; we should have made them speak differently, in substance they would have said the same thing; the Roman reader asked no more. And we also, after all the abuse made of local colour, are strongly disposed to be less severe on those who hold it of small account. There is no need to neglect it, however, and it is good if, without running to excess, we allow men and peoples their peculiarities, show them in their own dress, their own habits, and under their own features. It seems to us that this method of presentation animates history and gives it colour. Into our modern conception of it there enters a little more brightness and movement than that of the ancients permitted. In the pictures of the past drawn for our benefit, we want to find something more stirring, more resonant, more tumultuous, a life more varied, more intense, than had those of a former day; and since the spectacles afforded by history have often been compared to those represented on the stage, I shall say that, in reading our present-day historians, we dream confusedly of melodrama, whilst those of antiquity rather recall to us the serene comportment and the majesty of ancient tragedy.

After what has just been said, I cannot further insist on the services which ancient history has rendered us. I am satisfied to mention in conclusion the most important of all. In its defects and its qualities, thanks to the striking beauty of the scenes which it describes, to its solicitude for simplicity, for harmony, for fine proportions, for perfection of form, to the part it devotes to

morality, to the care it exerts in depicting exceptional beings as little as possible, and, though magnifying its great figures, leaving them that common basis of humanity which lets them remain in fellowship with us, and, whilst dominating the multitude by their lofty stature, march in its midst: in all those elements we find the explanation of why it has proved so admirable an instrument of education. Since the Renaissance it has reared the entire youth of the civilised world. We are told that the charm is broken now, and that ancient history is being abandoned. I am not sure that those who say so are right, and I have my doubts whether our young people have grown so unresponsive as alleged to the fine recitals of Plutarch and Livy, which stirred their fathers. What I know and what I can affirm is this: that on the day when ancient history has disappeared from our schools, there will be something lacking to them.

CHAPTER III

THE JUDGMENT OF TACITUS ON THE CÆSARS

TACITUS passed a very rigorous judgment on the Cæsars; it is fitting we should ascertain if it were just. For long it was accepted without question and formed public opinion. To-day many critics and historians consider it too drastic. If I desired to set forth all their objections and discuss them one by one, it would be an infinite labour. I intend to confine myself to saying how the question has presented itself to me, and by what arguments I have thought it can be solved.

I

Attacks on the veracity of Tacitus. Voltaire. Linguet. Napoleon. The Second Empire.

It was in Voltaire's *Dictionnaire philosophique* that I first came across doubts of the veracity of Tacitus, and there, I confess, I hardly looked for them. Voltaire is as a rule very severe on Augustus, with whom he is angry for having destroyed the Roman Republic; he had, then, no reason to assume the defence of his successors. And so it was not in the interest of Caligula or Nero that he attacked 'that fanatic scintillating with wit,' as he calls Tacitus, but in order to apply to him in all its rigour the method by which history, it seemed to him, must be reconstructed, especially the history of antiquity. He wished that it should be freed from its bondage to the text of the ancient authors, and that their testimony should be open to discussion and only accepted when conforming with probability. 'What clashes with the

ordinary course of nature,' he said, 'is not to be believed'; and assuredly he was right, if he meant to say that all the authorities in the world cannot force us to admit that the impossible has happened. The only thing to do is to look closely, and not be too ready to suppose that an extraordinary matter must, simply because it is so, be impossible. Voltaire was sometimes self-deceived, and this was precisely what happened to him with regard to Tacitus. Thus it sufficed him to think he saw some incidents hard to explain in the admirable account of Agrippina's death, at once to refuse belief in it. The chief motive inducing him to condemn in a general manner the judgments of Tacitus and the succeeding historians on the Cæsars, was his discovery of exaggerations in them, which roused his suspicions. 'So soon as a Roman Emperor,' he remarks, 'has been assassinated by his Prætorian guards, the carrion crows of literature pounce upon the carcase of his reputation.' The horrors imputed to him, besides being discredited by their very excess, have another grave defect for Voltaire, which withholds him from any faith in them. 'It is,' he says, 'because they do too much shame to nature.'[1]

As yet there was only skirmishing; but shortly afterwards an advocate called Linguet opened a pitched battle.[2] Linguet was a sort of literary free-lance, of whom there were so many then, needy and audacious, in a great hurry to make a name and convinced there was no better means of drawing attention to himself than that of tilting against accepted opinions. He had written an apology for the Jesuits at the very moment of their expulsion from the kingdom; he proclaimed 'that philosophers are the worst enemies of the human race,' and that no more evil service can be done men than to enlighten them; he abused Montesquieu, whom every one else exalted to the skies, re-wrote in his own fashion the *Esprit des Lois*, and, pending his dragging Cicero through the mire, saw good to cast aspersions on Tacitus. They are to be found in the book he entitled *Histoire des Révolutions de*

[1] Napoleon called Tacitus 'a traducer of humanity.'
[2] See on Linguet, M. Cruppi's interesting book.

l'Empire romain, a work of very moderate merit, of which the better and more curious part is decidedly that in which Tacitus is maltreated. He would fain persuade us that 'it is with trembling that he dares to confute him,' but there is no need to take this seriously; Linguet has a relish for scandal, and we can rest assured that he makes his confutation without any sort of tremor or remorse. His malignity to Tacitus is first exhibited in the motives he alleges for his severity. He is not content to claim that he was one of those peevish spirits 'who see nothing in the world but feigned virtues or disguised vices': that reproach was not without some apparent justification, and we shall see that it is one of those revived in our own days. But, by a singular contradiction, whilst he makes him out to be a snarling pessimist, he wants at the same time to represent him as a fawning sycophant who hunts after princes' good graces. 'The most extravagant satirists,' he says, 'are often the most dexterous flatterers. Who can rest assured that the implacable censor of Tiberius did not intend to make the evil he spoke of the successors of Augustus serve his fortunes with the successors of Domitian?' It is possible, then, that those virtuous angers, which have given him so many admirers, conceal a calculation dictated by personal interest. In all cases, Linguet asserts, they are quite unjust, and he claims to prove it by some examples. Is it credible, he asks us, that Tiberius, who up till then had lived an almost irreproachable life, should have waited to be old to wallow in the most revolting pleasures? 'Reason cries out that it is not at sixty-eight that a man begins the pursuit of excesses, at which more corrupt hearts blush at twenty. It is not when he inwardly feels that nature is failing him, that he takes to violating all nature's laws. Old age brings in its train avarice, mistrust, obstinacy, and even love of wine. But, as for the infamies attributed to that of Tiberius, it invincibly dispels their very idea by withdrawing the power to commit them.' Now, there are fine phrases which are not quite sound arguments. Would to Heaven that cases of profligate old age following a regular youth were as rare as Linguet

imagines! We have only too many examples of those senile passions in which age only betrays itself by the refinements it adds to debauchery, and it was right and true what Victor Hugo said in a beautiful line:

Jeune homme, auquel il faut des plaisirs de vieillard!

Not only does Linguet absolutely refuse to believe what Tacitus reports of the debaucheries of Tiberius, but he doubts many of the cruel deeds ascribed to him. He whittles them down, he explains them away, he finds them reasons and excuses; sometimes even he flatly denies them. His motive for scepticism is the same as that just given by Voltaire: they seem to him incredible. When Tacitus relates how Tiberius, weary of the length of trials and of the number of the accused, ordered the prisons to be emptied by the slaughter of those who crowded them, Linguet is stung to indignation; he protests against crimes 'which dishonour human nature'; he declares 'that the wickedness of men cannot go so far.' Poor wretch! some years later he had to witness the massacres of September and himself perish on the scaffold.

It does not appear that Linguet's invectives produced much effect in his own time. They were no doubt regarded as simply the freaks of a querulous and paradoxical spirit. Grimm was pleased to make the insolent remark that any one who maintained such monstrosities had need of more wit, and Mirabeau, alluding to the shady causes which Linguet had no repugnance to pleading, called him Nero's advocate. It was some years later that the attacks on Tacitus acquired more importance when politics entered into the matter. Napoleon, who looked upon himself as the heir of the Cæsars, never pardoned the historian for having spoken so ill of his predecessors. The *Mercure* was suppressed because Chateaubriand had eulogised Tacitus in its pages, and poor Chénier, having dared to write—

Que son nom prononcé fait pâlir les tyrans,

was pitilessly deprived of the post which he held in the University and which gave him a living.[1]

The struggle recommenced in the bravest style with the Second Empire. For fifteen years Roman history was a field of battle, where the combatants hurled Emperors at each other's heads. This time the conflict was more serious. Those amongst us who, out of affection for the restored Empire, were anxious to weaken the authority of Tacitus, betook themselves to Germany for weapons. Germany was at that moment (1852) very ill-disposed to him, and it must be admitted that the arguments she used to confute him were worth a great deal more than those which satisfied Voltaire and Linguet. There were attempts by subtle analyses to set him in contradiction with himself or with the historians of his time; reasons were sought in his character, his political principles, his connections, for throwing suspicion on his testimony; critics essayed by all sorts of arguments and researches to rehabilitate the princes he has condemned, Tiberius above all,—for it must be remarked that it is always round Tiberius that the battle rages against Tacitus. The campaign was skilfully directed, save that, as happens in all rather passionate polemics, it went fast to extremes. It was not enough to establish what was true: that Tiberius was a very able politician who governed the provinces well and maintained the Empire in peace; they wanted to prove that he was an honest man, 'a good and noble nature,' and, as it was difficult to deny that much blood had flown under his sway, the blame was laid on the victims, who had exasperated him by their resistance. It was quite in this fashion that things were presented at Capreæ; we know it on the evidence of Velleius Paterculus, the most brazen flatterer of Tiberius, who deeply pities the poor prince for having been obliged to deprive himself of so many members of his family, whom he has put to death one after the other, so effectively that in the end there no longer

[1] It is well to read in Garat's *Mémoires* of Suard the manner in which the Emperor, when receiving the Institute on January 29, 1806, expressed himself on Tacitus, and the courageous response of Suard; and, in those of Talleyrand, his conversation with Wieland at Weimar.

survives to him any but Caligula, he of their number assuredly who least deserved to live.

These attacks, despite their element of exaggeration, involve some risk of spreading disquietude among the admirers of Tacitus. It is necessary, then, that we should ask ourselves what basis they have, and whether we can fully confide in him, or whether we must only do so with precautions and reservations. It is this that we shall now seek to learn.

II

Is it possible to know the opinion of his contemporaries on the veracity of Tacitus? Testimony of the younger Pliny. Success of the *History*. The conclusion to be drawn.

Evidently the best course to make sure that some one tells the truth, is to find out about it from people in a position to know. Let us then address ourselves to the contemporaries of Tacitus, to those who bordered on the epoch the history of which he related; they alone can tell us if he accurately reports the events and equitably judges the men.

And first, to go back as far as possible, to the very moment when his works appeared, what do we know of the reception they had on publication? Pliny's letters, without being so precise on this subject as we should wish, tell us something. We must, then, following many others and summarising their labours, recover the indications they afford us.[1]

It has been remarked that, through the first four books of this correspondence, there is no question of Tacitus save as a man of great eloquence who, so far, apparently has only composed orations. Pliny on two occasions extols those he has delivered in the Senate; he represents him surrounded by young men, who come to form themselves on his model in the art of public speaking; he takes

[1] I shall especially make use of the *Étude sur la Vie de Pline le jeune*, by Mommsen (translation of M. Morel in the *Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études*, 15e fascicule). Mommsen is the first to have essayed to fix the epoch at which the different books of Pliny's correspondence were published. M. Philippe Fabia contributed to the *Revue de Philologie*, 1898, an article entitled, *Les Ouvrages de Tacite, réussirent-ils auprès des Contemporains?*

him as arbitrator on a disputed point of oratorical art, and professes readiness to submit to his verdict. Among the orators of the time he seems to assign him first place; and he so much the more willingly eulogises him, since, hoping for the second place himself, he feels that the more he exalts him the more he raises himself.

But about the opening of the fifth book, the publication of which M. Mommsen dates between 105 and 106, we find a somewhat enigmatic letter, which gives cause for reflection. It is a response of Pliny's to one of the leading men of that period, Titinius Capito, who has been advising him to write historical books. Others also, he tells us, give him the same counsel. The tone of the letter is that of one excited, disturbed, undecided. It is between eloquence and history that he hesitates; to one he owes his reputation, and has arranged to devote to it the rest of his life; but he plainly sees that the other, when successfully practised, brings a more speedy and a more extended renown.[1] Now Pliny, who is a simple soul, is incapable of cloaking the passion he has for glory; he confesses that he ceases not from dreaming day and night of what he may be able to achieve 'that his name may fly upon the lips of men'; and so he announces that, later, when he has finished correcting and publishing his past discourses, he will turn to history, and even begs Capito to suggest a subject he shall be able to treat.

What then has occurred which can explain this letter? Whence this sudden infatuation for a science of which there has never hitherto been any question with him? How is it that, from several quarters at the same moment, there seems a general intent to persuade Pliny for history to desert eloquence, with which he is known to be exclusively occupied? To this inquiry every one has given the same answer. Obviously some historical work must then have been produced, the amazing success of which put the literary

[1] Pliny's letter (*Epist.* v. 8) deserves to be read with care; it may serve to correct several delusive ideas current about history among the ancients. It is frequently supposed that with them it was the same thing as eloquence; Pliny very plainly marks the differences between them, and the diversities even in their resemblance: *Habet quidem oratio et historia multa communia, sed plura diversa in his ipsis quæ communia videntur.*

world in a turmoil, caused authors who possessed renown to fear its loss, and inspired those longing to win it with the idea of imitating the new work. If this hypothesis be the true one, it is natural to suppose that the appearance of the first books of the *History* could alone have roused such excitement. Than these books there is nothing in Tacitus more dramatic, more enthralling; and when to-day we read the marvellous accounts of the deaths of Galba, Otho and Vitellius, it is not hard to understand the mingled admiration and surprise which they caused those who knew them for the first time.

From the year 98, in which the *Agricola* and *Germany* appeared, Tacitus must have been engaged on the *History*, which he had been meditating since the death of Domitian. He bestowed much labour upon all his works; Pliny says so, and we perceive it in reading them. We can be sure that he only made public the earlier books of his great work,[1] when he believed that nothing more remained to be done. He took his time about it, since between the appearance of the *Agricola* and the letter of Pliny just mentioned seven years had elapsed. How was the book produced before the public? Although no one may have said so, it is highly probable that it was by means of public readings. They had been very fashionable since Augustus; before handing over a work to the bookseller, that he might have it copied and put it in circulation, the author read it to his friends, his acquaintances, before a cultured audience invited to hear it. It was one way of feeling the pulse of opinion, and, in the absence of all other means of advertisement, of attracting attention to him. Many sought in it merely the gratification of vanity, but serious writers found it an expedient for consulting enlightened persons as to flaws they had left, which permitted their correction before the final edition. It is natural to suppose that Tacitus, like many others, used this method,[2] and the work, when

[1] The letters of Pliny show that the *History* was published successively in sections, as each part was finished.

[2] *Pliny* (vii. 17) includes history among the forms of literature usually presented in public readings.

carefully studied, seems indeed to have retained some trace of it. Public readings had this drawback, that the author, to secure attention from a fashionable audience, often bored and absent-minded, was induced to multiply effective turns of expression, brilliant apophthegms (*sententiæ*), the sparkle of words and ideas. These tricks are not lacking in the early books of the *History*; they are specially noticeable at the end of paragraphs. One would say that the author aims at terminating his developments, his discourses, his stories by some point which awakens the assemblage; and this point is usually so happy, so striking, that, with a little imagination, we seem to hear the applause breaking forth every time.

It has been said that that applause is to be explained by the indulgence of Tacitus to the feelings of his hearers. Just as he adapted himself to their literary taste by his style of writing, so it may be supposed that he sought to flatter the vigour of their political passions by the opinions he expressed, and the conclusion drawn that it was to pleasure them that he vilified the Cæsars. I do not think so: however violent he may seem to us against the bad princes, he was not so violent as the world in which his books were produced. We know that there was at Rome a terrible outburst of wrath on the death of Domitian. People flocked to the public lecture-halls to hear tell of his victims, to relate their doom, 'and to render the last honours to those whose obsequies they had been unable to follow.' Once even the narrative was so poignant that the audience could scarcely hear it to the close, and the reader was implored not to continue, so great was the agony and shame experienced at the recollection of what had been endured with such cowardice![1] It was not, although it has often been asserted, a book of Tacitus which was being read that day. Pliny does not mention the author's name; he is content to say somewhat disdainfully, *recitabat quidam*. We may rest assured that had it been his friend, he would have refrained from passing over in silence that glorious name which would have given the

[1] Pliny, *Epist.* ix. 27.

anecdote more point. In presence of inflammatory works which produced such great effects, Tacitus perhaps feared that his own might be deemed rather lukewarm. It may possibly be to warn the reader against such a misconception that he insinuates at the beginning of the *History*, 'that it is easy to gain credit when we speak evil of masters, and that malignity is pleasing by reason of its air of independence.' It was no doubt with the same motive that he also took the precaution of affirming in the same passage that, though he may owe his political advancement to the princes of the Flavian family, the favours he has received at their hands will have no influence upon his judgment. He does not wish, if found too moderate, to have his moderation ascribed to his gratitude. His rule, he lets it clearly be understood, is not to seek the triumphs of a day by flattering the passions of the moment, but to keep his eyes fixed upon posterity.

He had not, however, to await the judgment of the future on his works; we have just seen that even in his own time their success must have been considerable. It also appears to have been sudden, which completes our conviction that they made their first appearance in public readings; those readings were then what with us is the theatre, where a successful author achieves renown in an evening. That success, which we have conjectured from the letter of the fifth book of Pliny, all those following confirm. Tacitus, who till then has only been an orator to his friend, becomes thenceforth almost solely a great historian; Pliny foresees that his works shall be immortal,[1] he proclaims that the man he has celebrated shall live eternally.[2] And these are not the insipid compliments with which fashionable persons, like him, are so readily profuse. What shows he is in earnest is the trouble he takes to let Tacitus know of the efforts, which he applauds himself for having made, to transmit his works to posterity: he would not crave with such insistence to hold a place in books which he

[1] vii. 33: *Auguror, nec me fallit augurium, Historias tuas immortales futuras.*

[2] vi. 16: *Multum perpetuitati ejus (Plinii majoris) scriptorum tuorum æternitas addet.*

esteemed of indifferent merit and destined to oblivion. It has even appeared from certain indications as if a success, so unforeseen, so brilliant, may have awakened in that soul, upright but enamoured of fame, a slight feeling of jealousy. Though he recognised with sufficient good grace the superiority of Tacitus, it must have grated on him that the distance between them was growing too wide. And so he slips into remarking that, after all, history is an easy art, and that 'however one writes it, one may be sure of pleasing the public.' But this envy, if it really existed, scarcely lasted. Pliny, in the result, agreed to revise the works of his friend, who corrected his, and their friendship remained unclouded to the end.

All, then, appears to demonstrate that the works of Tacitus were very favourably received by his contemporaries, that is to say by the people who were in the best position to know the truth. If it fell out thus, it was apparently because they did not find them in formal contradiction with their own memories, and because, generally speaking, in his statements and judgments he very closely reproduced the impressions of the greatest number. We have in that a first reason for putting confidence in him.

III

Tacitus and the later historians. Suetonius. Dion Cassius. The writers favourable to the Cæsars. The provincial writers. Tacitus did not form opinion, but found it already made.

Let us push our researches further. Let us see if Tacitus is also in agreement with subsequent historians. For the first century of the Empire, from Tiberius to Trajan, we have barely two historians of any importance, Suetonius and Dion Cassius.[1] They differed very much from each other, and neither occupied quite the same position as Tacitus. Suetonius served the Empire, but under special conditions. Whilst the consuls, generals and senators who fulfilled public functions, could say they were

[1] I put aside Plutarch, of whom nothing survives but what concerns Galba, Otho and Vitellius, who, between them, did not reign more than a year.

servants of the State rather than of the Emperor, he was attached to the person of the prince in the capacity of secretary. Nor did he belong by birth to the class which had most reasons to regret the old régime since under its auspices it had held a higher rank. Up to the day when circumstances, of which we know nothing, gave him access to Hadrian's cabinet, he was more especially a student (*scholasticus*), a burrower in libraries, pursuing small points of interest and curiosities of every kind. He has nowhere expressed his political views; the probability is that he hardly had any.[1] He seems to have a frank admiration for Augustus, he celebrates his institutions, he has no prejudice against his successors. He is no austere moralist like Tacitus, and we do not find in him the same accents of indignation when he recounts the same crimes; he is calmer, more master of himself. We feel him to be one of those persons who find amusement in the spectacle afforded by the world and life, one who looks on with relish and seeks opportunities to interest himself. He has, then, no object in altering the truth and must see things as they are. Between his writings and those of Tacitus some slight discrepancies have been remarked; and it has thence been concluded that they did not draw on the same sources, and worked independently of each other, which gives more value to the similarities between them. The impression left by their works is, on the whole, the same, and they have in fact passed the same judgment on the Cæsars; the Tiberius of Suetonius is as hateful as that of Tacitus, Claudius is not less foolish in one than the other, nor Nero less of a scoundrel.

We have still less reason to distrust Dion than Suetonius. He was a Greek by birth, whom the memories of the ancient Roman

[1] The only occasion on which he appears to have manifested a political opinion is in that passage of the *Life of Cæsar* where, after overwhelming him with eulogies, he decides that they had a right to slay him. But we know that Livy even, the friend of Augustus, asked himself whether it were not a misfortune that Cæsar had ever existed. Platonic regrets of this sort for the former government were of no moment. They are even to be found in Velleius Paterculus, the flatterer of Tiberius.

Republic must have left quite cold. Far from regretting it, he affirms that Rome would have been ruined had she continued living under the old régime, and that it was the monarchy which saved her. As he owed all to the Empire, his double consulate and the administration of Africa, he felt for her the sentiments of a model official; he could not put up with those whom he suspected of harbouring evil designs on the government he served. He is very hard on Seneca, on Helvidius Priscus, and on the philosophers generally, who appear to him insolent, mischief-making foes of established powers; 'as if it were the business of a sage to insult those who exercise authority, sow disorder in the rabble, and shake existing things so as to bring in new-fangled ideas.' We can therefore feel assured that he undertook the history of the Cæsars with the intention of not being hostile to them. And yet, in spite of all, he is carried away by the truth; he does not judge them differently from Suetonius and Tacitus; and, as his touch is somewhat harder, I am not sure if in him Tiberius is not still more repulsive than in the others. In any case it is impossible to obtain anything from his work which could serve to whitewash the princes whom they condemned.

We are told, I know, that we have only preserved the historians inimical to the Cæsars. As nearly all these princes perished by a violent death (which, by the way, is no proof that they were fondly loved), care was observed in the reaction following their end to destroy or conceal documents favourable to them; and their successors, being their foes, did not allow these writings to reappear, so that it was the victorious party alone which had the last word. This consideration is just, and we must take it into account. But do not let us forget that the reactions, however violent they might be, did not last for ever. With time passions calmed down, hatreds were appeased. Little by little the victor lost his popularity of the early days, and there was a return to a fairer appreciation of what had existed before him. If that past deserved any esteem, if it were not quite so black as it was the fashion to paint it, we may rest assured that the malcontents—of

whom there are always some after a few years of rule—would not have failed to revive its memory. The proscribed works would have been withdrawn from the shades, hidden copies would have come to light, and, had they been worthy to survive, we should probably have preserved them.

It is thus that we still possess the poems composed by Statius and Martial in honour of Domitian—the charm of their verse is an excuse for the subject; and it is very fortunate that they have not disappeared, for they give us an idea of what that court literature was, and the mendacities it could allow itself.[1] No one has ever taken it into his head to go and look for the truth in Martial or in Statius. The very enormity of their flatteries shows up their falsehood; without taking into consideration that one of the two poets lived long enough to recognise with a good grace their absolute lack of sincerity, and that he ended by comparing to Nero the same prince whom he had set above Jupiter. We can put no more confidence in the testimony of Velleius Paterculus, although he was not a poet. He was a writer of talent, but a mean-spirited creature who spent the most loathsome flatteries on Tiberius. To give them more point and freshness, it once occurred to him to put them in the mouth of people who do not flatter as a rule. He supposes that in Germany, on the banks of the Elbe, a barbarian chieftain, in his boat made from the trunk of a tree, approaches the shore occupied by the Romans, asks to see the prince, and, after contemplating him for a moment, departs saying: *Hodie vidi Deos!* Let us add, that if Velleius lauds Tiberius, he glorifies Sejanus yet more, and the eulogy of the minister amply demonstrates what that of the master is worth. I take it, then, that, had we still the works written at Rome during the lifetime of the Cæsars and in their honour, our present opinion of the latter would not be modified, and that we should think, like Tacitus, that they were panegyrics dictated by servility or fear.

The writings composed at the same period in the provinces

[1] See, at the end of this volume, the study of the poet Martial.

have rarely survived to us. In them the Cæsars were probably well treated, and I believe such praises were sincere. Nothing is easier to understand. The provincials knew the imperial government only by its benefits; they could take seriously the compliments which the Senate lavished on the Emperors, and which reached them in the *Official Journal*; they suffered little from their follies, for Tacitus is quite right in saying 'that wicked princes bear heaviest on their immediate surroundings.' It has been remarked that Philo the Jew judges Tiberius fairly favourably. He considers 'that he was grave and sincere, and only cared for serious things.' These encomiums, after all, were deserved, and if he does not temper them with any blame, it is because the prince's wrangles with the Senate and the great people do not touch him, leave him cold. He only dreams of his little land of Judæa which has prospered under the administration of Tiberius. It was not that that prince had any particular tenderness to the Jews. He very severely punished those settled at Rome for some rogueries of which they had been guilty, but in their own country he left them in tranquillity, lest the peace of the Empire should be disturbed. Philo asked nothing more, and when he thinks of Caligula, who wanted to force the whole world to give him worship, Tiberius, in comparison, appears to him a very worthy prince. For the rest, if Philo, who only surveyed Tiberius from Palestine, is not unfavourable to him, another Jew, Josephus, who lived for long at Rome, treats him like Tacitus and all the others.

To explain the historians' judgment on the Cæsars being in conformity with that of Tacitus, it has been asserted that the others took him as their sole guide, and that the success of his works carried away public opinion. This is a mistake; opinion had not waited so long to declare itself. We are told, no doubt, that some of those princes, the worst perhaps, were regretted by the populace and the soldiery; but we know that they had purchased that affection with liberalities; and the proof that there was no other reason for being attached to them is that Tiberius, who was worth more than they but was less lavish with the fortune

of the State, had no one to take his part on the day he ceased to inspire fear. Scarce was it known that he was dead, than the people started running about the streets of Rome, shouting, 'Tiberius to the Tiber!' He was accorded grand obsequies all the same; it was the correct thing; but no one had the idea of awarding him the honour he had himself bestowed on Augustus. Although in that sceptical society apotheosis was hardly made a precedent, neither the new prince demanded it for him nor had the Senate to accord it. In the following January, in the ceremony at which the magistrates swore to obey the laws of preceding princes, the name of Tiberius was omitted, and never was he subsequently restored to the roll of those whom the Empire honoured.[1] It was because people remembered 'of that fury of accusation which was rigorously enforced under his rule, and made more victims than did the proscriptions during the civil wars.'[2] These are the words of Seneca, who had been a witness of the later and more gloomy years of that reign. He had seen 'those informers who were set like dogs upon worthy folk, and who were fed on human flesh.'[3] He had lived in that society 'where security no longer existed for any man, where the ravings of drunkards were called to account, where the most innocent jests were distorted, where, when some one was accused, there was no further inquiry as to his fate; he was known to be a lost man.' Did Tacitus, fifty years later, say anything different? It was the same for Caligula and Nero as for Tiberius. Despite the regrets they left among those they had been wont to amuse and feed, none dared openly defend their reputation and deal such an insult to public feeling, as that of enrolling men who were scarce regarded as men in the ranks of the gods. I believe, then, that Tacitus found opinion quite formed on the subject of the princes whose history he wrote—I mean the opinion of right-minded people, that which always ends by winning the day. It even seems to me that, instead of seeking to inflame it, as supposed, he rather

[1] It is Dion Cassius who makes this observation (lix. 9).
[2] Seneca, *De Benef.* iii. 26.
[3] *Cons. ad Marc.* 26.

attempted to keep it within bounds. More than once he has declared against the exaggeration of popular rumours. It is thus that he declines to believe that Tiberius caused the death of his son Drusus by poisoning; but he did not convince the public, and the charge recurs three centuries later in Orosius.[1] When the great conflagration of the year 64 burst out, it occurred to every one that it was Nero who had set fire to Rome. Pliny the elder and Statius, the first writers to speak of it, have no hesitation in accusing him. Suetonius is quite convinced of his guilt. Tacitus does not commit himself, and is content to say 'that it is not known whether the fire were due to accident or to a prince's crime.'[2]

It seems to me that the study we have just made is of a nature singularly to reassure us on the veracity of Tacitus. It was not he, we have just seen, who created the tradition concerning the Cæsars; he found it fully formed, and his successors made no changes, though they had the opportunity of consulting other sources than his works. Had he distorted the truth so much as has been alleged, other historians would have been found to restore it, and that is just what has not happened. They may differ from him on certain details, but on essential points there are none who contradict him. The manner in which they judge the Emperors is on broad lines the same, and, however closely we examine them, they supply us with no reasons for mistrusting his testimony.

IV

The pessimism of Tacitus. Tacitus and Livy. The services rendered Tacitus by pessimism. The risks it made him run. Tacitus and the younger Pliny.

Such reasons, however, non-existent in the other historians, some have imagined themselves to detect in Tacitus himself: in his character, his education, in the prejudices which he owed to his

[1] *Ann.* iv. 11; Orosius, vii. 4.

[2] *Ann.* xv. 38.

connections or his birth. And from the first there has been the idea of crediting his severity to the account of his saturnine humour. He was, it is said, a pessimist, and I quite believe it. The Romans, as a rule, had a tendency to pessimism. What distinguished them from the Greeks was that they were, or wished to appear, serious to the point of austerity, grave to the point of melancholy, that they smiled less at life, that they distrusted eventualities, that they put small faith in men. It was natural, then, that Tacitus, so consummate a Roman, should be by instinct and temperament a pessimist. The sights he witnessed in his early youth were not of a nature to inspire him with contrary sentiments. He was twelve years old at the death of Nero. He saw four Emperors succeed each other in fourteen months, the Capitol burned down, Rome taken by storm, the Barbarians in revolt on the frontiers, the Empire on the brink of ruin. It is no matter for surprise that those things left him with morose dispositions. In the earliest works of his that we possess, the *Dialogue of the Orators* and the *Germany*, he already deals severely with the society of his time. The last three years of the reign of Domitian, during which he had immediately under his eyes the excesses into which a man who is omnipotent can run, when he is drunken with cruelty or distracted by terror, left an ineffaceable impression upon him. He maintains, no doubt, that on the accession of a prince who was a decent man, the Romans took heart again (*nunc tandem redit animus*); but I do not believe that the wound which those terrible years had inflicted on him ever closed. Even in the fairest years of Trajan's reign he must have looked forward to the future with some apprehension. To those who too easily abandoned themselves to temporal happiness, he must have been tempted to retort by the words which he put in the mouth of a far-sighted senator: 'Who can assure you there shall be no more tyrants? They thought like you on the death of Tiberius and Caligula, those who survived them; and nevertheless new tyrants have arisen, yet more cruel, yet more detestable.'[1]

[1] *Hist.* iv. 42.

It was in this frame of mind that he commenced writing his great historical works. The subject he had chosen was hardly of a nature to reconcile him with humanity. It must indeed be recognised that there are few histories so gloomy as that of the Cæsars, whatever efforts may have been made in our days to minimise their crimes. Tacitus, who has none the less undertaken its relation, does not hide from us the repulsion with which it inspires him. There are moments at which courage seems to fail him, when he has to unfold before our eyes that succession of horrible scenes which are ever the same, 'those perpetual accusations, those friends betraying friends, those judges only capable of pronouncing condemnation.' After having stigmatised the executioners, he cannot restrain himself from some irritation with the victims; he finds them too easily resigned to their doom (*segniter pereuntes*). He thought, no doubt, as was thought amongst ourselves at the time of the Terror, that they erred in making it a point of honour to die without a murmur; he asked himself whether some resistance on their part might not have awakened public pity.[1] When he feels sickened by the uniformity of horrors, and fears lest the reader may experience the same sensations as he, he dreams with some regret of the historians of the Republic; they, at least, had great and noble deeds to tell. They were not reduced to the recital of secret acts of vengeance, of the paltry rivalries of mistresses and freedmen, of monotonous cruelties. 'They told of great wars, of the storming of cities, of kings vanquished and taken captive; and, in home affairs, of the contentions of tribunes and consuls, of the land laws and corn laws, of the struggles of the people with the Senate; it was a wide and spacious theme in which they could move at ease. For my part, I am circumscribed in a narrow course, and my labours shall be inglorious.'[2]

In speaking thus, it is of Livy that he dreams, and it is very

[1] *Ann.* xvi. 16. As a matter of fact he has just related a little previously (9) the death of Silanus, who defended himself to the bitter end, and 'cut down by the centurion, with wounds that were all in front, fell as upon a field of battle.' It is no doubt thus he would have had them die.

[2] *Ann.* iv. 32.

plain that he can only dream of him with a kind of bitter jealousy. The contrast between them is certainly striking, both in the frames of mind in which they find themselves and in the feelings which are their stimulus. Livy's work was conceived in joy. One is conscious in it of that intoxication of national pride which Rome experienced, when, under the sway of a single chief, she better measured her grandeur. That pride inspired the history of Livy, which is its most vital expression. This is why in that immense work we never feel a moment's fatigue. The interest is being perpetually renewed with the story of fresh victories; the ever-waxing glory of Rome carries him on and sustains him. With her he joyously mounts to that summit which she attained under Augustus, and if, having reached those heights, he looks forth with some foreboding towards those paths of the future which to him seem dark and perilous, he has but to retrace his steps on the road traversed to become an ancient, as he says, to recover all his pride. About the middle of his labours, in the preface to one of his books now lost, he said 'that he had acquired enough renown to be able to stop, if his soul, which knew not repose, did not find its sustenance in his work.'[1] How far is Tacitus from this plenitude of satisfaction! Instead of 'finding sustenance in his work,' like Livy, he does not dissemble how ungrateful and mournful he finds it; it is a task which he has taken upon himself from a sense of duty, and which he achieves without pleasure.

He is, then, a pessimist, but pessimism is not invariably a danger for the historian. If it may sometimes mislead him, it may sometimes do him service. Tacitus owed to it one of his greatest qualities, that keen insight which prevented his allowing himself to be impressed by appearances, and showed him things as they were. It was not without value at an epoch when the government persisted in assuming to be what it was not, when, as Mommsen puts it, names no longer corresponded to things nor things

[1] *Satis jam gloriæ quæsitum, et potuisse se desinere, ni animus inquies pasceretur opere.* Quoted by Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, preface.

to names. Amongst those obscurities Tacitus saw clear. He was not one of those simpletons who took seriously the labels of liberty carefully preserved to befool the public. Caligula, in one of his vagaries, having dismissed the consuls, and being in no hurry to replace them, Suetonius remarks with somewhat droll gravity 'that the Republic was for three days without a government.'[1] Tacitus speaks in another tone: he scoffs at Tiberius who, in the case of a judgment which it was wished to postpone, invoked respect for the laws, the security of the Republic, the rights of the consul Varro, 'just as if there could be any question of the laws in this affair, as if Varro were really a consul and the government of Tiberius a Republic!'[2] Such was the truth. One of the great precautions of those princes was to instil the belief that all was for the best under their authority, that Rome had no regrets for the past, that she had never been happier in the present, more assured of the future. This *Felicitas temporum*, unblushingly affirmed in the official documents and accorded something like worship, no one could permit himself to doubt; it was a duty to be joyous, and one of the reasons why the Christians were suspected was their refusal to join in the public festivities and the air of melancholy detected in their seriousness. Tacitus never suffered himself to be taken in by those outward shows of prosperity; he realised the internal ills that were being endured and had no hesitation in naming them. To those who boast the flourishing condition of Italy, he replies by pointing to cities like Tarentum and Antium, which are depopulated.[3] They are proud of the victories won by the legions, and he rejoices over them like everybody else, yet here again he perceives some reasons for anxiety. The mutinies which break out in the army on the accession of Tiberius show to what point licence has crept into it; the soldiers recruited at Rome, who were formerly the best, are no longer aught but rowdies, for ever thinking themselves at the circus or theatre; the auxiliary troops, raised in conquered countries, are acquiring a dangerous ascendency, and observers are

[1] Suetonius, *Caligula*, 26. [2] *Ann.* iv. 19. [3] *Ann.* xiv. 27.

not wanting who say that 'in the Roman army there is nothing good save what is not Roman.'[1] The picture he draws of civil society is still less reassuring. The old nobility has almost disappeared, and what remains is put to hard shifts for a living; a Sempronius Gracchus is a second-hand dealer in Sicily; a Pollio fabricates spurious wills; an Aurelius Cotta, a Valerius Messalla and a Hortensius beg of the Emperor. What is more serious still, the slave population is constantly on the increase, whilst the free *plebs* is dwindling away.[2] Freedmen or sons of freedmen fill the best posts: 'They have so multiplied that, were they classified apart, the others would be alarmed at their own scanty numbers.'[3] These evils on which Tacitus remarks with so much force are those beneath which the Empire succumbed.

It is good, no doubt, to see things as they are; that, we have shown, is one of the great merits of Tacitus; but has he not sometimes seen them worse than they actually were? He has been reproached with doing so, not unreasonably, I think; and it is thus that his pessimism, which we have just found of service to him, had its prejudicial influence. The desire to read men's hearts to the very bottom, the dread of being duped, the poor opinion he has of men, impel him to search in their simplest actions for subtle and hidden intentions. He readily suspects them of baseness. From the opening of the *Annals* this tendency reveals itself. Augustus selected Tiberius to succeed him; it was not that he was ignorant of his vices; 'he wished to put himself in a favourable light by the contrast.'[4] In his testament he counselled his successor to make no fresh conquest; 'it is not known whether this were prudence or jealousy,'[5] and so on. What we must admire in him is that, being so disposed, he did not more frequently credit the malicious reports which people delighted in propagating, and which he must have been so much inclined to believe. We have noticed that on occasions he disputes them, but we are conscious that this resistance costs him

[1] *Ann.* iii. 40. [2] *Ibid.* iv. 27. [3] *Ibid.* xiii. 27.
[4] *Ibid.* i. 9. [5] *Ibid.* i. 11.

a struggle with himself: and that, if he relax but a moment his self-control, he will be led into accepting them.[1] It is a weakness against which it is fitting we should be on our guard in reading him. It is quite possible also that, in the pictures he gives us of his times, he may have darkened the colours; he seems conscious of it, since now and then he takes the trouble to correct himself. It is thus that, having depicted with admirable vigour the miseries and transgressions of Roman society since Nero, he suddenly pulls himself up to say: 'And yet that age was not wholly barren of virtues'; and he proves it by enumerating the good examples he has given.[2] Undoubtedly his preferences lie with the past, and to it he is usually disposed to sacrifice the present. It was the general opinion round about him that ancient usages should be adhered to, and that 'we only change to deteriorate.' And yet it sometimes happens that he praises his own times, and once even goes so far as to say: 'All did not go for the best before us, and our age too has brought forth virtues and talents worthy to serve as models.'[3] He deserves gratitude for these efforts he has made to be just.

In any case, to temper the severity of his judgments on his own epoch, it suffices to infuse therein some softer tints which we shall take from his friend, the younger Pliny; they serve for mutual correction. But, although the contrast is complete between the suspicious humour of the former and the universal amiability of the latter, there is one point on which they are agreed, and this unanimity merits remark. They have both the same opinion of the Emperors; what Pliny is led to tell us of Tiberius and Nero differs in no respect from the conception afforded by Tacitus, and

[1] I can quote a very curious proof of this. It was related that in later days Nero, to get rid of Seneca, had tried to have him poisoned by one of his freedmen. Tacitus reproduces this charge, which he has found in some contemporary memoirs, without either confirming or denying it: *quidam tradidere* (*Ann.* xv. 45). But, a few chapters on, suspicion turns to certainty. He tells us that the prince decided to use a more violent means, 'since poison had been unsuccessful' (xv. 60). This is a good example of his inward conflict between reason and instinct. Reason restrains him when he has the documents before him; instinct carries the day so soon as he is detached from them.

[2] *Hist.* i. 3.

[3] *Ann.* iii. 55.

they equally detested Domitian. It cannot, then, be asserted that it was the pessimism of Tacitus which inspired him with the judgment he passes on the Emperors, since Pliny, so decided an optimist, thinks and speaks like him.

V

Had the birth of Tacitus an influence on his judgments? What he may have owed to Greek culture. The broad and human character of his patriotism. His manner of judging the Roman domination. Prejudices due to his connections and to his time.

What influence could his birth, his connections, the society he frequented, the education he received, have exercised upon the opinions of Tacitus? The question is naturally pertinent in a country like Rome, where there was hardly any independent thinking, where people acted, above all, by regulations and uniform practices, where it was a virtue to reverence traditions, a law to conform to accepted views.

The family of Tacitus, as we have already seen, was of very recent ennoblement; which does not imply that it did not share the prejudices of the old aristocracy. It sometimes happens that great lords of fresh creation maintain them more passionately than others, with the thought of keeping their origin dark. Tacitus was too high-minded to give way to that absurdity; but it is in vain to try, one never entirely throws off the impressions acquired from childhood's environment, and I believe that by careful investigation we may detect some traces of it in him. It is thus that he remarks, without apparent surprise, that Germanicus was preferred to Drusus, his brother by adoption, 'because the great-grandfather of the latter was a mere Roman knight, Pomponius Atticus, whose ancestral image seemed to disparage those of the Claudii.'[1] One may truly say that he forgets that he himself has sprung from an Equestrian family. Elsewhere, in speaking of the disorders of Livia, the wife of that same Drusus, whom Sejanus

[1] *Ann.* ii. 43.

had seduced, he especially reproaches her 'for having prostituted herself to a lover born in a provincial town.'[1] It was thus that indignation reigned at the Court of Louis XV., when the King allowed himself to take his mistress from the middle class. But these are only isolated passages: as a rule Tacitus is not partial to the aristocracy; he dissimulates neither its cowardice nor its crimes. Once only, he pleads for leave to keep silence on the names of the sons of illustrious houses who dishonoured themselves at Nero's feasts. 'As they are all dead and gone,' he says, 'I will not name them, out of respect to their ancestors; the most infamous, after all, is not he who commits a sin, but the prince who rewards him for committing it.'[2]

By the side of that family education, which for him, as for all Romans, was summed up in his worship of tradition, there was another, that given by the grammarian, the rhetor, the philosopher, which kept the young man entirely absorbed in scholastic exercises, attentive to his master's word, and bent over his books, until the age when he assumed the garb of manhood, that is to say about sixteen. This second education was wholly Greek, as amongst ourselves it was for long almost wholly Latin. It is to-day the fashion severely to condemn this system of training youth in a world where it is not to live, instead of directly introducing it into that in which it must really dwell. And yet is it not of advantage to snatch the young man for a season from the grasp of his habitual environment, so as to prevent him from being over-inoculated with the prejudices of those about him, and to widen his intellect by affording him a glimpse of another society than his own, of people who have other usages and other ideas? What at least is certain is that the Greek education produced the best results at Rome. To it Rome owed the qualities which were not hers by birth; all that at times she had of generosity, of breadth, of liberalism, proceeded thence. Alone and shutting herself within herself, her naturally inflexible, imperious, narrow temper, with the egoism added by

[1] *Ann.* iv. 3. [2] *Ibid.* xiv. 14.

her instinct for domination, and her keen eye for her own interests, would have only caused exasperation in that people of peasants, soldiers, and jurists. There was need to have recourse to the Greek school to acquire a taste for intellectual things, towards which she scarce inclined of herself, and, above all, to initiate herself in what was the essential Greek virtue, the sense of humanity. The blending of the two peoples' qualities was necessary to form that Roman civilisation on which we still subsist.

It is impossible that Tacitus, enlightened as he was and open to the spirit of intellectual inquiry, did not profit from Greek culture. Despite his distrust of philosophy, we are quite conscious in reading him that he has made it a study; he has certainly retained something, if unwilling to take all. He was very patriotic; we see it in the joy he displays in relating some Roman success; but his patriotism is neither narrow nor blind. He does not deem himself bound to abuse the enemies of his country; he is much fairer to Arminius than is Livy to Hannibal. When concerned with the past he does not regard it as a duty to attribute to Rome a history consisting only of triumphs, and, for example, he does not dispute, like many others, its capture by Porsenna. In the present he is not to be imposed on by the fine words his fellow-countrymen employ to justify their domination, and only repeats them with a smile. The elder Pliny is at a loss to understand why the barbarous nations, which are so wretched at home, do not come forward of themselves to take the yoke of the Romans, and why they esteem it a misfortune to be subject to them. 'If they were victorious,' he says, 'if they remained free, it is then that they would have cause to pity themselves!'[1] This is not the feeling of Tacitus; he has not that plenitude of national pride that inspired the Romans with the notion that people might congratulate themselves on being their slaves; on the contrary, he recognises that the peoples which Rome has conquered have often reason to complain, and he even puts their complaints in marvel-

[1] *Nat. Hist.* xvi. 1.

lous relief by the vigour with which he voices them. It is in him, more especially in the speech of Galgacus, that we seek the reprobation under which the Roman supremacy is burdened to this day: *raptores orbis . . . quos non Oriens, non Occidens satiaverit . . . ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant.*[1]

It is true that in another passage he has undertaken its defence. The answer to the assertions of Galgacus is to be found in the speech of Cerialis.[2] It is one of the finest, strongest, profoundest pages that he ever wrote. Cerialis is victorious; he has just entered the city of Trèves which had rebelled. According to ancient rights he can permit himself all. He assembles in the market-place the trembling citizens, who expect the most rigorous treatment. But he is satisfied, for all his vengeance, to point out to them, without violence, without threats, that they have done the gravest wrong in taking up arms. His arguments are unanswerable. He reminds them that the Romans only entered Gaul at the appeal of the Gauls, their ancestors, whom the Germans were oppressing. The Germans were, as they are still, lavish of fine promises. Every time they cross the Rhine, they announce that they come to give the Gauls their independence; but are they to be believed? 'All those who would fain enslave neighbouring nations invariably pretend they are bringing them liberty.' The Romans, at least, have not been a heavy burden on the conquered world. If they impose a tribute on the peoples they have subdued, it is because the task they have undertaken of assuring public security requires the maintenance of armies: 'now, without armies there is no tranquillity for nations; without pay no armies, and no pay without tribute.' For the rest, between victors and vanquished no distinction is made. 'You can attain all things,' says Cerialis to them: 'you command our legions, you govern the provinces. When princes are malevolent, we suffer from them like you, more than you, for we are nearer to

[1] *Agric.* 30 *et seq.* 'He makes a solitude and calls it peace.'—Byron, *Bride of Abydos*, ii. 20.

[2] *Hist.* iv. 73, 74.

them. Righteous princes do good to every one. We must put up with the wicked as we put up with barren seasons or floods. The fine weather is at hand which consoles us for storms.' What marks out this speech among those of Tacitus is the complete absence of rhetoric. Cerialis talks like a soldier, in a tone of decision, but calmly, almost coldly. Its basis is certainly that of a patriot, since reasons are stated which legitimise the Roman power; but it is a patriot who loves his country without passion and without illusion. He even goes to the point of foreseeing, what a Roman scarce looked for, the ruin of that Empire which seemed to have the promise of eternity. He declares that if that misfortune comes to pass, war, a terrible war, shall be let loose over the whole universe. 'Eight hundred years of prosperity and discipline have built up this vast edifice: those who overthrow it shall be buried in its downfall.' That is just what happened. In speaking thus Tacitus seems to behold and predict the terrific cataclysm in which the Roman Empire was swallowed up.

If it was truly Greek science which gave such a sense of proportion and foresight to his patriotism, to that science the glory is due; it was a great service that it rendered him; but we are forced to recognise that he did not invariably profit so well by its lessons. He had prejudices of which philosophy could not cure him; unfortunate remarks escape him on the subject of the slaves, the gladiators, people upon whom ancient society bore so hardly, which prove that in many things he did not rise superior to the people of his world and his time. In speaking of those four thousand freedmen, infected with Egyptian or Jewish superstitions, whom Tiberius banished to the island of Sardinia, he declares that if they should die of fever there, the loss would be small (*vile damnum*).[1] The great human massacres in the amphitheatres leave him somewhat cold, and he reflects that, after all, the blood that flows in those combats is of trifling value (*vili sanguine*).[2] He very easily resigns himself to the execution of those four hundred poor wretches, who were dragged to their death merely because chance

[1] *Ann.* ii. 85. [2] *Ibid.* i. 76.

willed it that they had slept in the house where their master had been assassinated. It is an injustice assuredly; 'but is there any means for keeping that brood in check save terror?'[1] How remote are we here from the breadth and mental freedom of Seneca, so humane, so generous, so emancipated from the opinions of his time, who has spoken so well of the slaves, who condemns so strongly the gladiatorial combats, who proclaims so loftily 'that man must be sacred to man'! It is true that this same Seneca remarks somewhere in the most natural tone in the world: 'When a child is born weak or deformed, we drown it.' So hard a thing it is completely to resist even the most monstrous prejudices, when, round about, they are universally accepted.

VI

The religious views of Tacitus. How the Stoic theology afforded the means of combining belief in the unity of God with the practice of popular rites. Did Tacitus believe in magic, omens, and oracles? His opinion of the Jews and Christians.

That singular amalgam of lofty ideas and vulgar prejudices we are about to recognise in studying the religious beliefs of Tacitus; it is a study which completes our comprehension of him.

He has nowhere expressly set forth his profession of faith, and, in all probability, he had no very settled views on such subtle questions. We note that, in the case of the immortality of the soul, he does not venture beyond a hope: *si quis manibus piorum locus.*[2] It is presumable that he adhered to that vague monotheism which, owing to Greek philosophy, had become the belief of all cultivated minds. This seems deducible from the famous passage in which, despite his detestation of the Jews, he does homage to the elevation of their doctrines. 'They only conceive of God,' he says, 'by thought, and recognise but one alone; they treat as blasphemers those who from perishable materials fashion gods in the likeness of man; theirs is the supreme and eternal God, whose image may not be bodied forth, and who shall never perish.

[1] *Ann.* xiv. 44. [2] *Agric.* 46.

Thus they suffer no images to stand in their cities, still less in their temples, nor any statues, either to flatter their kings or to honour the Cæsars.'[1] Without positively averring that he shares their views, it appears to me that he allows it to be understood by the way he expresses himself. The same sentiments are to be encountered in an important passage where he speaks of the Germans: 'They believe that to imprison their gods within walls, or represent them under human form, is to do outrage to their majesty. To their worship they consecrate the woods and forests, and those mysterious solitudes, where they worship without beholding them, seem to the Germans the divinity itself.'[2] Here again he has no need to tell us that his own feeling is in sympathy with that of the Germans; we can plainly discern that, to his mind, that barbarous folk have discovered the true method of honouring the gods.

Does this imply that in ordinary life Tacitus abstained from attending the temples in which were 'immured' the gods of Rome, and from participating in the rites performed in their honour? Undoubtedly it does not. Like nearly all the people of his class, he combined belief in one God with the practice of a worship which supposed a multitude. This no doubt meant contradicting himself; but apart from such contradictions being everywhere common enough in the religious sphere, a philosophical sect, the most important of all at the time, had found means to conciliate all. The Stoics, contrary to the usual idea of them, had no disdain for popularity; they addressed a wider public than is supposed, and made more concessions to win it over. It was thus that they thought of a system, which permitted those professing the philosophical doctrines to adapt themselves without overmuch repugnance to their country's religion. Those dexterous moralists made it a game of skill to interpret the strangest legends of mythology—those of which Horace said that they taught the art of ill-doing[3]—in such a sense as to make them reasonable and

[1] *Hist.* v. 5.
[2] *Germany*, 9.
[3] *Peccare docentes . . . historias* (Horace, *Od.* iii. 7).

moral. To harmonise the unity of God with polytheism was a harder task; but the very nature of the ancient religions helped the Stoics to succeed. As they had no rigid dogmas, no theological teaching, no settled creed, they offered feeble resistance to the attempts made to modify them by interpretation. Those subtle theologians, by dint of theorising about the essence of the gods, of whom nothing more than the name could be asserted, and who lent themselves to any development, ended by draining them of all reality. They were no longer divine beings, leading their own individual existence, but merely manifestations or functions of the supreme God, in such a manner that any one who honoured them offered worship, in a roundabout way, to the sole divinity.

Thenceforth they could be honoured without overmuch misgiving, which came as a relief to all those who, loth to isolate themselves from the many, liked to do as the world did. Their number was great at Rome, where reverence reigned for ancient usages, where the practice of worship filled so large a place in life, where the priesthoods were political offices which a statesman could not afford to despise. The system of the Stoics did them signal service; it afforded them a means of fulfilling their civic duty, without, however, too emphatically giving the lie to their philosophical opinions. It was this that enabled Cicero to be augur without causing any one surprise, and Tacitus to form part of the College of the *Quindecimviri sacris faciundis*, and in that capacity to preside over Domitian's secular games.

Nevertheless it must more than once have happened that citizen and philosopher did not hit it off. The compromises imagined by the Stoics for reconciling contradictions did not always smother in worthy people the qualms of their conscience or reason, when confronted by immoral legends or absurd superstitions. This was specially noticeable in some of them as regarded portents and oracles,—what was called divination. Nearly every one believed in it then, and the authorities more perhaps than others, since they held it in dread and severely punished those who consulted sorcerers; but they, poor wretches, had yet stronger faith in it,

since neither exile, nor prison, nor death could prevent them having recourse to such consultations. Here again we find the Stoics coming to the assistance of popular beliefs. With an inexhaustible indulgence they found very plausible arguments to legitimise divination, to establish it as a genuine science, which had its own principles and method, and deserved the same confidence as the others.

What does Tacitus think of it all? It is not easy to know. Once he seems resolved on enlightening us on the depths of his thought; he very clearly enunciates the problem, and asks himself 'whether human affairs are ruled by eternal laws, or whether they flow on at the caprice of chance.' But he recoils from a definite conclusion, and in reality does not conclude at all. He is satisfied to tell us that 'the majority of men cannot renounce the idea that the fate of each mortal is fixed at the moment of his birth';[1] which leads to the vindication of astrology; and, as is his habit, he seems much inclined to follow the opinion 'of the majority of men.' He makes some reservations, it is true, for he fears to appear credulous or to be taken in. The magicians deceive themselves sometimes: is there any need for surprise? 'the margin is narrow between delusion and science';[2] they often lie: 'they are a race of men who make a business of betraying the mighty and abusing the gullibility of the ambitious';[3] but often too they tell the truth: did they not predict to Tiberius and Nero and Vespasian what was to befall them? As for the portents that precede and announce great events, Tacitus never fails to mention them: it is an old custom and he conforms to it. 'I would not dare,' he tells us, 'to pass over in silence facts attested by tradition, and treat them as idle tales';[4] and he dislikes those who have not the same respect for tradition as he. He finds fault with the freethinkers who ridicule evil omens and neglect the practices by which their effects may be averted. A Roman general had not taken them to heart in an engagement with the Parthians, and,

[1] *Ann.* vi. 22.
[2] *Ann.* iv. 58: *breve confinium artis et falsi.*
[3] *Hist.* i. 22.
[4] *Ibid.* ii. 50.

what was more, had insufficiently fortified himself. These are two faults for which Tacitus blames him, making no distinction between them, and to which, in equal proportions, he ascribes his defeat.[1] And yet he himself, when he has to mention such things, and they happen to be rather extraordinary, seems at times a little uneasy. There are instances of his introducing them with a jest which sounds a jarring note,[2] and once, even, he confesses that never are so many marvels remarked, as when there is a tendency to believe them in advance.[3] These are evident proofs of an inward conflict between his credulity and his common sense.

In this connection I wish to say a word on a question which has often been discussed, but which affords yet another proof of the extent to which he lets himself be swayed by the opinion of others. How can it be that a man whose religious beliefs were so hazy, should deem it his duty to handle the Jews and Christians with such severity? He had, moreover, reasons to be favourable to them. We have just noticed that he speaks sympathetically of the manner in which the Jews conceive of the divinity and honour him. As to the Christians, he was well aware that they had not set fire to Rome. He tells us himself that a terrible punishment was inflicted upon them, which the public interest did not justify, 'and which was but a gratification given to the cruelty of one man,' so that hearts were wrung with compassion at the spectacle.[4] But, for Jew and Christian, Tacitus only gave ear to the common prejudices; he speaks of them as they were spoken of around him. The Jews, brought to Rome in great numbers after the triumph of Pompey, had very speedily assumed an important position there as elsewhere. Cicero tells us that in five years they became so numerous and so influential, that they disturbed the popular assemblies, and that an orator who did not want to raise a storm was compelled to humour them.[5] They formed at Rome a degraded

[1] *Ann.* xv. 7.

[2] Is there not a pointed epigram in this phrase from the *History*? 'We believed that the decrees of destiny promised the Empire to Vespasian, after it had come to pass.'

[3] *Hist.* ii. 1. [4] *Ann.* xv. 44. [5] Cicero, *Pro Flacco*, 66.

population fitted for all occupations. Whilst the men haunted the Forum, spreading rumours on behalf of the agitators who paid them, the women told fortunes at home;[1] the children, dressed for the part by their mothers, held out their hands to the passers-by in the groves of Egeria, side by side with the sulphur match-sellers, the sailors who worked compassion by showing the picture of their shipwreck, and other beggars of the kind.[2] They dwelt beyond the Tiber in those suburbs into which, to use the phrase of Tacitus, flowed all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world,[3] and which, no doubt, resembled the sordid quarters in which they are huddled at this day in the great cities of the East. All combined, then, what was seen and what was heard said, to inspire people already brimming with supreme scorn for those Asiatic nations 'born to bondage,'[4] with loathing for them.

This was what prejudiced Tacitus against the Jews, much more than their religious beliefs. In attacking them he assents to an opinion generally held around him; but he assents to it with such virulence, that this serious man seems to lose all sense of proportion when he refers to them. He adopts a tone of anger and spitefulness which is not becoming to the historian. One would say he cannot find terms strong enough in which to arraign them; he strains his vocabulary, he accumulates grievances, without taking any trouble to justify them.[5]

His detestation of the Christians, which is expressed in the same tone, clearly appears to have the same source. He does not altogether confound them with the Jews, since he denotes them by a particular name, knows the founder of the sect, and tells us the precise epoch at which it began its existence.[6] But he

[1] Juvenal, vi. 542.

[2] Martial, xii. 57.

[3] *Ann.* xv. 44: *quo cuncta undique atrocia et pudenda confluunt.*

[4] Cicero, *De prov. consul.*, 5.

[5] *Genus invisum diis—instituta sinistra, fœda—projecta ad libidinem gens—mos absurdus sordidusque —despectissima pars servientium—deterrima gens*, etc.

[6] People go on repeating that, for long, the Romans confused the Christians and the Jews. Yet the imperial police distinguished between them in the time of Nero, for it was certainly as Christians, not as Jews, that they were persecuted. Suetonius

knows 'that this scourge has come out of Judæa,' and that suffices for him to condemn them. And so we find reappearing the same violent and unmeasured invectives which he has lavished on the Jews: *execrabilis superstitio . . . per flagitia invisos . . . sontes et novissima exempla meritos.* Let us again remark here that no proof is offered of all these charges; we are neither told what are the crimes which have made them execrable, nor for what they have deserved the last severities. One alone of these crimes is indicated with any precision: he accuses them of hating the human race, *odium generis humani*, a reproach he has already made the Jews: *adversum omnes alios hostile odium*; and he addresses it to the Christians only because they are Jews by origin.

It must then be admitted that Tacitus has more than once allowed himself to be carried away by the prejudices of his time; we need scarcely be surprised at it, seeing how the strongest and most independent intellects of their world did not always succeed in resisting them. But is this any reason for believing that his judgments on the Cæsars and Cæsarism were entirely suggested to him by the prepossessions and dislikes of the circles he frequented? Before affirming it there is one question which must be asked and solved. As we can only communicate to others what we have in ourselves, we must first inquire whether that society, of which it is alleged he was the docile echo, was in very truth composed of stubborn foes of the imperial régime, determined on finding nothing in the whole history of the Cæsars but blunders and crimes, resolute partisans of the ancient government, labouring with all their might to restore it; in a word, if it be possible that it inspired Tacitus with the sentiments for which he is censured. This is pretty much what is generally said, but we must learn if it is right to say so.

also says in so many words that it is a new superstition: *Christiani, genus hominum superstitionis novæ ac malefidæ.* (*Nero*, 34.)

CHAPTER IV

THE POLITICAL OPINIONS OF TACITUS

Is it true to say that Tacitus, who, as we have seen, sometimes submitted to the impressions of those about him, was more especially indebted to them for his political opinions? Was it because they were republicans and enemies of the imperial régime that he himself became so? To believe this it would be necessary, first, to establish that the people around him were republican, and, secondly, that he was so himself. These are two questions which we shall now attempt to solve.[1]

I

The malcontents at Rome. Were they enemies of the Emperor or of the Empire? The attempt to restore the Republic after the death of Caligula. The nature of the other conspiracies.

The first will not detain us long. Undoubtedly in aristocratic society, among the distinguished people of Rome, the malcontents were numerous; and it must be admitted that under Caligula or Nero they had some right to be so. Let us also remember that —during a period of literary expansion—the civil wars burst unexpectedly upon that society, given over to what was still a novelty —the amenities of fashionable life—and with a capacity for seeing and saying all. The revolution which destroyed the Republic

[1] I have already touched on these questions in the work entitled *L'Opposition sous les Césars*: Paris, Hachette. Recurring to them thirty years later, I have no essential change to make; I shall only add new developments, especially in what concerns Tacitus.

was not sufficiently powerful to change habits. After the peace people resumed their talk 'at dinners and in company.' Everything had free discussion, but more especially the prince and his relatives. As those witty and censorious persons were not, as a rule, well-disposed to him, he could do nothing good or ill in which some occasion was not found for finding fault. This is what we plainly perceive in Tacitus. From the moment that the good actions of the rulers, as well as the bad, were indifferently assailed, it was natural there should be grumblers under the best princes, just as under the most wicked. Four years after Domitian's death, when Trajan was toiling with all his might to cure the Empire's diseases, the grumbling continued, and Pliny deemed it his duty to remark to the Emperor in a solemn harangue: 'Lend not your ear to those malignant judgments, those secret murmurs which can only do harm to those who pay them heed.'[1] There is no doubt then, that, towards the end, in the aristocratic world of Rome, the habit was inveterate of reviling the government of the prince, whoever he might be and whatever he might do.

But it is trite to say that there were recalcitrants under the Empire; they are notoriously always in evidence, and no political system is privileged to satisfy every one. What is important is to know what their intentions were, and what they desired to substitute for those princes of whom they spoke so much evil. In this matter we must not allow ourselves to be deceived by appearances. As they had ever the name of the ancient Republic in their mouths, it might be supposed that they were labouring for its restoration. But let us recall that it was a pious usage among the Romans, a duty almost, to glorify the good old times, and that the Emperors themselves did not fail to do so, though assuredly they had not the slightest intention of returning to them. If we wish to know what precisely must be thought of all those ostentatious displays of memories and regrets, the facts provide enlightenment. Conspiracies were very frequent under the early Cæsars, and the historians who relate them tell us the causes of

[1] Pliny, *Paneg.* 62.

their inception: it is nearly always hatred of the Emperor, rarely hatred of the Empire.[1] We scarcely find a single instance of the conspirators holding out any promise to restore the old order of things; they would not have failed to do so, had they believed that that order retained numerous partisans who might assist them in their enterprise. It may rarely happen sometimes, when a sudden mutiny breaks out in the legions, that the mutineers, who have not had time to concert their plans, cover themselves with the name of the people and Senate and pretend to be working for them, pending their discovery of an Emperor.[2] But, the Emperor chosen, there is no longer any question of Senate and people.

One alone of these conspiracies, that in which Caligula perished, was followed by a serious effort to re-establish the Republic;[3] and even then it appears that those who were its leaders obeyed personal motives in the first place, rather than political reasons. Their chief, Chærea, was a tribune of prætorian cohorts, to whom the prince had several times commanded tasks which were repulsive to him; as he executed them with a sufficiently bad grace, Caligula, who was a witty fool, had punished him with biting mockeries, which he could not stand. But, whatever may have been the original cause of his resentment, he did not wish that this time the Empire should survive the Emperor. Caligula dead, the Senate assembled at the Capitol. The circumstances were appalling. Every one still shuddered at the scenes which had just taken place at the theatre, where the German soldiers had thrown themselves on the spectators, threatening at random all those they could reach, to avenge their prince. The mob howled at the Forum, demanding a new Emperor without delay. However, if Josephus is to be believed, the senators dared to resist, and the consul Sentius Saturninus even proposed openly to revert to the

[1] Tacitus explicitly states that since Cæsar and Pompey the civil wars have no longer had any other motive than the choice of an Emperor: *nunquam postea nisi de principatu quæsitum* (*Hist.* ii. 38).

[2] *Hist.* i. 55.

[3] Josephus has twice spoken of Caligula's death, in the *Jewish Antiquities* and in the *Jewish War*. It is more especially in the nineteenth book of the *Jewish Antiquities* that he gives curious details about the attitude of the Senate.

Republic. For a moment it looked as though this project were going to succeed. Some military tribunes, won over no doubt by Chærea, declared for the Senate with their cohorts. The very populace, after some resistance, seemed disposed to follow them, and cheered the assassins of Caligula. But an unexpected incident occurred to change everything in a moment. A prætorian who, with the mob, was scouring the rooms of the Palatine, caught sight of a man hidden behind an arras, his feet alone protruding. It was Claudius, the uncle of the late prince, who, convinced that they were going to kill him too, threw himself on his knees before the prætorian, begging for mercy; the other, for all response, proclaimed him Emperor. At once the soldiers declared for him, and, early on the morrow, when the senators again assembled, it turned out that all had been settled without them. It was, too, their own fault; they had not been sufficiently prompt to act. During the night many had reflected, and, the morning come, the less courageous had left for the country instead of betaking themselves to the Curia. In others ambition had awakened: those who could cherish some hope of being elected Emperor began to feel less ardour for the Republic. In vain Chærea would have essayed a last effort; his soldiers, refusing him a hearing, went off to join the troops of Claudius, and what senators remained followed in hot haste, each apprehensive that he would be reproached with arriving the last.

Such a pitiable venture was not calculated to enlist partisans to the Republic. And so, some years later, when Furius Camillus (a noble republican name) dreamt of ridding the Romans of Claudius, he had not overmuch difficulty in securing attention from the senators and knights, exasperated by the prince's stupidity and cruelty; but scarce had he breathed a word to the soldiers of 'the government of the Senate and the people,' than all forsook him. Piso's great conspiracy under Nero was but a coalition of hatreds against a prince held in detestation by all decent folk. None dreamt for a moment of restoring the Republic; it was a matter of replacing one Emperor by another.

Lucan himself, who was in the humour for writing the *Pharsalia*, so full of republican sentiments, made no scruple of risking his life to give a master to Rome, and Tacitus likewise tells us that careful precautions were taken not to enlist the consul Vestinus in the plot, 'because it was feared he would be too solicitous for liberty.'[1]

Accordingly no powerful and homogeneous party formed against the Cæsars, with a fixed programme and definite intentions, which saw clearly what it wanted and toiled without respite to achieve it; but haphazard conspiracies, momentary explosions of personal hatreds bearing a grudge against the man rather than the régime. To understand the reason for this, let us recall what was the nature of the Empire. A political party is determined, not only by the principles which it professes, but by the character of the government which it attacks. Had the Empire been a pure monarchy, the opposition would not have failed to be frankly republican. It was uncertain and undecided because the Empire was so also, and clad an absolute authority in republican externals. We may suppose, no doubt, that among these malcontents there were some who were not satisfied with coining fine sayings about the old Republic, but who were disposed to attempt some enterprise and risk their lives for her. The others did not go so far, and would have been contented with the correction of some excesses of authority, some abuses of power. What amply proves that they were not irreconcilable enemies of the Empire is that, as a rule, they sought in the imperial family for some prince who passed for being more liberal than the others, Drusus or Germanicus, and to him transferred all their affection and all their hopes. They said that 'if he became master, he would restore liberty to the Roman people.'[2] Did that imply that he would abdicate his sovereign power, and reduce himself to the office of the magistrate of former days? No one was foolish enough to believe it; but liberty, as they understood it, had nothing of a levelling character. It did not exact the root-and-branch suppression of the imperial

[1] *Ann.* xv. 52. [2] *Ann.* i. 33.

rule; it was satisfied with some easily obtained concessions, and under a prince who was a good man, respectful of the ancient traditions, willing to treat the Senate and great families with some consideration, it could get on well with the principate. This was quite the idea of Tacitus, seeing that, in a famous phrase, he congratulates Nerva 'on having joined together the sovereign power and liberty';[1] which proves that he did not consider them incompatible, and that this combination appeared to him the ideal of a good government.

It seems to me that it follows from what has just been stated, that the society in which Tacitus lived had not the views that are generally attributed to it, and that it is hard to believe that he thence acquired detestation of the Empire.

II

The first steps of Tacitus in his political career. The *protégé* of the Empire. His opinions at the moment of his writing the *Dialogue of the Orators*. The political conclusions of the *Dialogue*.

This detestation, for that matter, was not heart-felt, and is to be found in none of his writings. Republican, in the sense now attached to the word,[2] Tacitus was not at any period of his life.

It can first of all be concluded from the good reception given him by the Empire on his entrance into political life, that he was not then her enemy. Do not let us forget that he not only speedily obtained public functions, but that he held them by the direct favour of the princes. He does not hesitate to acknowledge it at a time when it might perhaps have been to his interest to keep it dark. But we have a still more evident indication of his opinions at the time in the first writing of his which survives to us, the *Dialogue of the Orators*. This work, very interesting in itself, is still more so when we think of the author's position. I have thought it possible to affirm that, although probably only

[1] *Agricola*, 3.

[2] Tacitus already takes the word *respublica* in this acceptation, and opposes it to the imperial government: *quotusquisque qui rempublicam vidisset* (*Ann.* i. 3).

published after the death of Domitian, it must have been written earlier. Tacitus at that time had just been quæstor or ædile; he had made a brilliant first appearance at the bar, and no doubt at the Senate also; he was in Pliny's phrase 'in the prime of renown.' It was to his interest, then, to glorify the orators of his age, amongst whom he held a high place. But his judgment is so resolute, his sincerity so whole-hearted, that he treats them severely, though his severity reacts upon himself. 'The noble name of *oratores*,' he tell us, 'we no longer dare to give them; it is reserved for those of yore. Ours are called *causidici*, *advocati*, *patroni*.' And it is from no casual and transitory malady that contemporary eloquence suffers; with whatever splendour it may seem to shine, he believes it condemned to an irremediable mediocrity, and he states his reasons for it.

Among the reasons are those which pertain to the bad education which young men receive in their family or with the rhetors, and to the unseemly practices which had come to be used at the bar. Attention had already been called to the latter; they did not escape Quintilian's good sense. But Tacitus adds another of much greater gravity, which he was the first to mark, which had passed unnoticed, or which there was a disposition not to see, and upon which we must insist so that all its importance may be grasped.

Literary criticism, for Aristotle and his disciples, was, above all else, a branch of philosophy. They treated literature like the other products of the mind; they studied each of its branches by itself and detached from all conditions of time and place, seeking to investigate its own individual nature, reducing it to its essential and unchanging elements, imposing absolute rules on it in accord with the laws of pure logic. This is what may be called æsthetic criticism. To-day we pursue another method; we reinstate the great writers in their environment, convinced that most often their epoch elucidates their works. This is historical criticism, which we did not invent, but of which we have made better use than any did before us. The Greeks practised the former especi-

ally; it seems to me that the Romans caught a glimpse of the latter. In one of his letters to Lucilius, Seneca, after declaring, like Tacitus, that the eloquence of his time is in full decline, puts the blame on the corruption of public manners: *talis hominum oratio qualis vita.*[1] This axiom risks appearing a platitude to-day; it was a novelty then to make the literature of a people depend upon its moral status. Tacitus goes further; he enunciates a newer and more profound idea, when he connects it with its political status. I cannot recall any one at Rome having done so before him, at least in a manner so precise. His reflection is that the decline of the oratorical art is the natural and inevitable consequence of the establishment of the Empire. Under the Republic speech was mistress of all. The gravest questions affecting the fate of nations were debated at the Forum, in broad daylight, before the whole people, in passionate disputations; and the very violence of these disputations seems to him a necessary condition for the art of public speaking to attain its perfection. 'Great eloquence,' he says in a celebrated phrase, 'is like the flame. It needs fuel to sustain it, movement to excite it, and it is only in burning that it shines.'[2] He adds that Augustus pacified it as he pacified all else, but, as it was made for war, peace was fatal to it. Banished from the public place, imprisoned within locked doors, reduced to figure no longer save in show debates before restricted audiences, great eloquence was dead, and, so long as the Empire endured, it could never be born again.

We have here a conclusion which doubtless would not have been to Quintilian's taste. He too had written a treatise, which we no longer possess, on the causes of the corruption of eloquence. We know that he detected many flaws in that of his contemporaries, but they were flaws which might cure themselves; for the reform of his time he counted upon the young men who came from his school, and in their number he already points to some 'who follow in the footsteps of the ancients.' I quite believe also that Pliny, who had read the *Dialogue of the Orators*, since he quotes a saying from

[1] Seneca, *Epist.* 114. [2] *Dial.* 36.

it, could not possibly have shared all its ideas. Proud as he was of his talents, gratified by his successes, he would have found it painful to resign himself to a necessary inferiority. Tacitus, on the contrary, took his resolution in manly fashion. It is clear that without overmuch difficulty he renounced the hope of ever vying with the ancient orators. No one, it would seem, could have had more reason than he to regret a state of things so favourable to great eloquence, which would undoubtedly have afforded him so high a place; and yet he seems to bear the loss very easily. In the picture which he draws of the ancient Republic, he emphasises its bad more than its good features—which was almost a novelty—he points out the perils of that anarchy 'which fools call freedom.'[1] 'Rome,' he says, 'was wasting away her strength in party contentions; there was neither peace in the Forum, nor concord in the Senate, nor regularity in judgments, nor respect for superiors, nor settled limitations of the power of magistrates.' He sees nothing there on which to look back with regret, and, all things considered, his own epoch appears to him the happier. Affairs are better ordered in it; it is no longer an ignorant mob that rules, it is the wisest, and the sovereignty of one alone assures public tranquillity.[2] He fully accepts the Empire accordingly, and not only accepts for himself, but would fain take with him those young men, inflamed by school successes, who dream of a great future. He does not conceal from them the fact that under the Republic their eloquence would have found worthier subject matter, and that there they might have attained more brilliant political fortunes, but, at the same time, he points out what those fortunes cost, what dangers it was needful to run in order to achieve them, and what price Cicero paid for his glory. It is best, then, to take one's epoch as one finds it, and adapt oneself to it with a good grace. 'Since it is not possible to obtain at once great renown and tranquil ease, let each enjoy the advantages

[1] *Dial.* 40: *alumna licentiæ quam stulti libertatem vocant.*

[2] *Quid opus est multis apud populum concionibus, quum de republica non imperiti et multi deliberent, sed sapientissimus et unus.* (*Dial.* 41.) Do not let us forget that we are at the period of Vespasian.

of the age in which he lives without decrying that in which he does not.' Here are wisdom and moderation themselves, and yet nothing is more remote from the conception some people would offer us of Tacitus.

III

The political opinions of Tacitus at the death of Domitian. The *Agricola*. What was his purpose in publishing it? The position he assumed between the parties.

In truth these words date, in all probability, from a time when Tacitus was young, favourably regarded by the Emperors, happy in the present, confident of the future; he had not yet lived through the last three years of Domitian's tyranny. Are we to take it that that ordeal, from which as we have seen he suffered cruelly, may have changed his political opinions? This can be learnt from the *Life of Agricola*, the first in date of his historical works, which was published in 98, at the opening of the reign of Trajan.

The *Agricola* broaches a somewhat delicate problem, which has been much discussed and solved in various ways: how was Tacitus led to compose it? It seems clear that he had not at first thought of it. After Domitian's death and the accession of Nerva, he dreamt of writing the history of the events of the recent past. To shake off the apathy of a great many Romans and prevent them forgetting, he judged it useful to put again before their eyes the wrongs to which they had submitted and the manner, as happy as unexpected, in which they had just been delivered. How was it that, without actually renouncing his project, he left off to busy himself with another work?

The oratorical tone prevailing in the *Agricola* has led some critics to conjecture that it was a kind of *laudatio funebris*,[1] and that Tacitus wrote it in order to render his father-in-law an honour of which he may have been deprived at the time of his

[1] Hübner, *Hermes*, i. 438 *et seq.* See also the work just published by M. Friedrich Léo, professor at the University of Göttingen, entitled *Die Griechisch-Römische Biographie.*

death. The same thing was being done at the moment in the public lecture halls. There eulogies of Domitian's victims were in course of delivery, and we have seen that Pliny regarded it as a duty to be present. But it must be remarked that Agricola was not quite in the position of the persons whose funeral orations Pliny went to hear. It could not be said that he was one of the victims of Domitian, since he had died in his bed and probably of a natural death. All could attend his obsequies, and we know from Tacitus himself that nothing was lacking in the honours accorded him.[1] Domitian, who no longer dreaded him once he was dead, would not have committed the blunder of uselessly outraging him by preventing the recital of his eulogy at the tribune, as was customary. Only it is possible that this eulogy, in which the orator felt constrained by his master's jealousy, may not have altogether satisfied Tacitus, and that he may have had a mind to re-write it, that he might give Agricola's exploits all the glory they deserved.

Filial affection would thus strictly suffice to explain his writing this book. And yet when it is read with care, we perceive that he must have had another intention still. Had he only wished to glorify his father-in-law, it seems as though he would have gone to work in a slightly different fashion. Assuredly he sets in strong relief his military talents and his great merits as an administrator. That was the essential point; but he is singularly persistent in applauding certain of his qualities which are not what the world, as a rule, puts in the front rank,—sense of proportion, prudence, tact, modesty, dislike to vain protestations and barren boasts, resignation to the inevitable. It was doubtless fitting to remark upon these neutral-coloured virtues: they have their value, and had it especially in the epoch at which Agricola lived; but Tacitus would not, with a certain affectation, have so extolled them, had he not had some reason for it. It is necessary to suppose that this cautious wisdom was not universally pleasing, and that there were people who treated it as pusillanimity. It is

[1] *Agric.* 45.

evidently for those that Tacitus writes; he opposes to their bluster the example of this upright man, who knew when it was politic to give way, and who skirted obstacles instead of shattering himself against them. He gives the extremists to understand that it is easy to declaim against tyranny, now there is no longer a tyrant and it can be done without risk; but that every one submitted to it, they like the rest, when there was no means of coping with it; and to have the right to address them with perfect freedom, he unhesitatingly includes himself among those terror-stricken senators whom Domitian made his accomplices, and who resigned themselves to condemning the victims whom they were powerless to save. 'Our hands,' he says, 'our own hands, dragged Helvidius to prison.'[1] He means to say, 'When the informer Publicius Certus had thrown himself upon him to hale him to the dungeon, where he was to be slaughtered, we allowed him to do it. None of us, neither myself nor the others, had the courage to interpose between the assassin and his victim. Nor, further, did we hinder Baebius Massa from shedding Senecio's blood and from laying the burden of it upon us, and it is hardly fitting to assume an arrogant attitude to-day after so much weakness.' To those violent partisans of the morrow who talked big and did not spare their adversaries, he responds in the same tone; he sets up against them the prudent conduct of Agricola, and the actions on which he most congratulates him must be precisely those for which the others reproached him. What is remarkable is that the *Agricola* was written whilst the fever following on Domitian's death still prevailed. It required true courage to compel attention to words of wisdom and moderation in the midst of such violences. Tacitus detested Domitian as much as anybody, and has not spared his memory; but, in spite of the joy he felt in being delivered from him, he was capable of self-command and of not overstepping the bounds which became the dignity of his nature. His friend Pliny did not follow his example altogether. He relates, with adorable simplicity, that, when he saw Domitian dead, he judged the

[1] *Agric.* 45.

occasion good to pursue the guilty, to avenge the victims, and, incidentally, to make himself conspicuous (*se proferendi*).[1] He determined, then, to cause a sensation by making a surprise attack on that Publicius Certus, who has just been referred to. If he waited for some time before commencing on the affair, it was because he feared that his voice might be drowned in the confused clamours of the first day. When he considered he could produce a greater effect, he asked the Senate for leave to prosecute before it the denouncer of Helvidius. The discussion was very animated, and the consul, well aware that such passionate wranglings were not to the Emperor's taste, was eager to adjourn the sitting before a decision had been reached. Pliny had not then the sanction he requested, but he had obtained what was his dearest desire: 'he had made himself conspicuous.' Tacitus, who had just been consul or was about to became so, was, no doubt, present at this scene; I do not believe that he was one of those who, at the close of the sitting, threw themselves into Pliny's arms, shaking him by the hand, embracing him, overwhelming him with plaudits; at least we do not find his name figuring among those who took part in the debate. He must have remained in his seat, convinced that all this commotion in the void could have no result of utility to the Republic.

Whilst his friends were wearing themselves out in sterile agitations, he was preparing two works of entirely contrary character and tendency, the *Life of Agricola* and the *History*. In the latter, which was to relate the crimes of Domitian, he proposed to snatch from their torpor souls cowed by tyranny; the *Agricola*, on the other hand, censures the people 'who have for ever the name of liberty in their mouth,' and who stir up all sorts of dangers without profiting any one. He is, then, desirous of inspiriting the lukewarm and pacifying the extremists. Such is his true attitude: he is a moderate, who at once assails all excesses and takes his stand between extremes. It is clearly apparent that Agricola, whose life he has taken such pleasure in relating, is for him more

[1] *Epist.* ix. 13.

than a victorious general and able administrator; he admires him as much in civil life as at the head of armies or provinces; he is the type of what the Roman ought to be under the Empire, submissive to the laws, devoted to his country, doing his duty without ostentation, alert to avoid exciting his master's jealousy and provoking his wrath, the foe of root and branch opposition and fruitless audacities, accepting the necessities which cannot be shirked, happy to live under good princes and enduring the bad, 'as we resign ourselves to storms in awaiting fine weather.'[1] This example which he holds out to others, it is very probable that he himself made it his business to follow, and that, through his whole life, he took as his rule of conduct the words with which he concludes the eulogy of a man who was capable of retaining to the end the friendship of Tiberius without ceasing to be honest: 'Between the resistance which ruins and the servility which debases, cannot human wisdom find a course exempt at once from ignominy and peril?'[2]

IV

The political opinions of Tacitus in the latter part of his life. What he thinks of the different forms of government. The ancient Republic. The principate. The democratic government. The aristocracy. He resigns himself to the Empire.

Let us advance a little further in the life of Tacitus to the period when he was giving the public his great historical works. At that moment his political career was completed, or on the point of being so. He had attained to all the dignities which a Roman statesman could expect. Can we know the effect produced on him by experience of affairs and the practice of authority? Do we perceive in the *History* and the *Annals* that time had in any way altered his opinions?

We have seen that he has nowhere left us his profession of religious faith; no more has he professed his political faith; he disliked bringing himself on the scene. But it appears to me that

[1] *Hist.* iv. 74. [2] *Ann.* iv. 20.

his works, when attentively read, show that he remained in his maturity what he was in his youth. In the fourth book of the *Annals*,[1] which he must have written towards the second half of Trajan's reign, a certain circumstance leads him to speak of the various forms of government. Like Aristotle and the Greek philosophers, he distinguishes three of them. 'In all nations,' he says, 'in all cities, power belongs to the people, to the great, or to a single man.' Then to these three forms he adds a fourth, 'that which is composed of an assorted combination of the others.' By this last he means the old Republic as it existed at Rome at the height of its prosperity. It was thus, at least, that it appeared to Polybius, when he visited Rome towards the close of the Punic wars. According to him all was so well balanced, so perfectly arranged, that no one, not even a Roman, could affirm without fear of error, whether the government were aristocratic, democratic, or monarchical. 'Merely to consider the power of the consuls,' he says, 'one would think oneself in a monarchy; only taking account of the authority enjoyed by the Senate, it would seem an aristocracy, and any one who should only see the part taken in politics by the people would at first be tempted to consider it a democratic State.' And, nevertheless, these diverse elements ended by adapting themselves to one another, and existed side by side in perfect equilibrium. This definition of the Roman constitution appeared very accurate to those who saw it in operation, and Cicero reproduced it in his *Republic* on the very eve of the birth of a new régime. It is to be remarked that this form of government does not inspire Tacitus with the same admiration as Cicero and Polybius. He simply tells us that 'it was more easily praised than established, and that, were it established, it could not possibly endure.' This terse and dry observation completely proves to us that the downfall of the ancient Republic did not leave Tacitus inconsolable, and that he did not believe in the possibility of a return to it.

There remain the three others, which he is content to enumerate

[1] *Ann.* iv. 33.

without telling us which he prefers, or what he thinks of each. Nor does he inform us, at least at this point, in which of these three categories he places the principate, that is to say, the government under which people were living at the time. Those, however, who had business every day with this government had an interest in knowing what it really was, which was just what it did not wish to be revealed; it was offended at attempts to analyse and define it; it concealed, so far as it could, its principle and nature. We have here one of those *arcana imperii*, of which Tacitus speaks, which it seemed dangerous to divulge. To understand the motives for this kind of obscurity in which the Empire liked to shrink from view, some explanations are necessary, and it is well to look into things from an earlier period.

Had Cæsar had time to accomplish his task, it is likely enough that he would have founded a monarchy. In the way in which he got himself offered the title of king by his friends, people believed they saw his own desire for it; they also saw in the way he was forced to decline, that there was no disposition to allow him to assume it. Augustus was more adroit: he had the royal authority bestowed on him without the name. He endeavoured to spread the belief that there had been no change whatever at Rome, and that the establishment of the sovereignty might be reconciled with the preservation of the Republic. It seems to us that this was supposing a most unlikely credulity in the Romans; but our surprise lessens when we reflect that there were precedents to facilitate their self-delusion. They were well-accustomed to seeing the creation, in times of peril, of extraordinary magistracies. The dictatorship, which concentrated in itself the power of all the other functions of the State, did not have the effect of suppressing the Republic, and the two continued to exist together. True, the dictatorship only lasted for a time, and indeed for a very short time, whilst Augustus fully reckoned on retaining his authority all his life, and even hoped to hand it on to his heirs. The problem consisted, then, in disguising so far as possible this continuity of power, and in founding heredity without saying so. Augustus

succeeded in it; he merely had himself granted the temporary magistracies when they were renewed on expiry. Very soon these renewals became a simple formality, so much a matter of habit, that the *decennalia* and the *vicennalia* ended by being solely occasions for solemn feasts. As for heredity, never did the Emperors explicitly demand it for their family, it was never expressly accorded to them; but none the less was it ever for a moment in doubt that their son, if they had one, or their nearest relative, or he whom they had chosen as successor, should take their place. Heredity persisted throughout the Empire, unmentioned by name, as a practice not as a principle. On the prince's death, his heir had himself acknowledged by the Senate and the soldiers, who had no inclination to refuse, and this appearance of election satisfied the most scrupulous. We may suppose, then, whatever surprise it may cause us, that what was uncertain and delusive in this system could be taken seriously by many persons. The fact is that even if the world does not lack querulous spirits, everywhere on the look-out for something to grumble at, there are many more easygoing folk who only demand pretexts for being satisfied. These latter heard tell of prætors, of consuls, and of tribunes, and it was not hard to make them believe that, the names having remained the same, the things had not changed either. By their side were others who could see more clearly, but were reluctant to open their eyes. Pliny seems to me to represent very well this category of complacent people, willing to appear dupes. 'Let us live,' he says, 'under the Republic of to-day in such a manner as to persuade ourselves that it really is a Republic';[1] and when he was appointed tribune of the people, although he knew very well that another possessed the tribunician power, and that he had only been granted an empty title, he succeeded in persuading himself that 'it was something.'[2]

What is more surprising is that, in our own time, the clouds are not yet quite dispelled. There are historians, and great historians, who still allow themselves to be imposed on by appearances, and

[1] *Paneg.* 93. [2] *Epist.* i. 23.

take words for realities. Because Tiberius was one day pleased to remark that 'the Emperor must be the servant of the Senate,'[1] and Nero to invite the Senate to resume its ancient functions,[2] they imagine that he really restored them; they want to make us believe that the power belonged at once to it and the Emperor, and they have even invented a word (the Dyarchy) to designate this joint government. But when we look into things closely, we soon perceive that if the Senate had remained a great name, it was merely a name; that the rights which it inherited from the past it never put in practice except at the prince's desire and as he desired; that it only continued to fulfil certain functions, devolved on it by custom, on condition of watching for the most trivial of the Emperor's fancies and conforming its decisions to them. Is this truly a Dyarchy, this government, where one part does no more than servilely perform what is pleasing to the other? In reality indeed it was the prince who was master, the sole master; who in a more or less direct, more or less circuitous manner, according as he was more or less audacious, more or less timid, invariably did whatever he wished. Suetonius relates how one day that madman of a Caligula, when he had invited the two consuls to dinner, suddenly burst into peals of laughter, staring at them the while; and how on the consuls gaily asking him the cause of his merry humour, he replied: 'I am thinking of how I have but to make a sign for both you two to have your throats cut!'[3] And assuredly had he wished so to do, no one would have stood in his way. We have here indeed, I believe, what is called absolute power.

Tacitus had no delusions in the matter. Friend of the Senate as he was, proud of holding high place therein, he had no desire to conceal the extent of its authority. He is very happy to inform us that at the beginning of the reign of Tiberius all great questions were discussed before it; that it was requested to summon the attendance of the deputies of towns and provinces,

[1] Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 29. [2] Tacitus, *Ann.* xiii. 4.
[3] Suetonius, *Caligula*, 32.

to hear their complaints, to judge their differences. One is conscious that Tacitus exults in relating one of these great scenes. 'What a grand day!' he exclaims with delight.[1] But even then he is not self-deceived. He knows well that what is left to the Senate is but a phantom of its ancient authority. 'The prince,' he says, 'abandoning to it the guise of power, kept the reality to himself.' The régime under which people lived was not, then, as alleged, a joint government; it differed in no respect from an actual monarchy; it was a single man who possessed the supreme power: *haud alia re romana quam si unus imperitet.*[2]

So here we are again at the three forms of government which Tacitus has at the outset discriminated: democracy, aristocracy, monarchy. There are no others, since the principate is included in the last, and the old Republic has been eliminated as difficult to establish and still more difficult to maintain. Thus it is between these three forms that the choice must be made. Tacitus has not felt it necessary to tell us explicitly for which he declares. He was, no doubt, under the impression that his works sufficiently suggested it.

We can first of all exclude democracy without hesitation. From the manner in which he everywhere speaks of the people, it is clear that to him it hardly seemed worthy to participate in the conduct of public affairs. It had, for that matter, no pretentions to it, and its one anxiety, Tacitus tells us, was to get its corn cheap or for nothing.[3] However low it might have fallen, the people still caused some apprehension to the princes, who carefully avoided incurring its ill-humour. At the first sign of wrath which it manifested on hearing of Octavia's exile, Nero hastened to give way and take her back.[4] And so a great deal of trouble was taken to satisfy it; it was fed and amused; as a rule it asked for nothing more. Tacitus had no love for the populace, and it must indeed be admitted that the populace he had under his eyes at

[1] *Ann.* iii. 60. [2] *Ibid.* iv. 33. [3] *Hist.* iv. 38.
[4] *Ann.* xiv. 60. It is true that he sent her off again some days later, for he was well aware how long the people's indignation lasted.

Rome hardly deserved to be loved. He has drawn marvellous pictures of it at times: he was perhaps the greatest painter of mobs who ever lived. We must read the description he made in a few lines of the battle that raged in the streets of Rome between the soldiers of Vespasian and those of Vitellius.[1] The populace looks on as at a spectacle. It applauds the victors, it pursues the vanquished into the retreats in which they take refuge, to hand them over to those who are hunting for them. It fancies itself at the circus or amphitheatre; it derives amusement from the incidents of the sanguinary strife, forgetting that these are not gladiators slaughtering each other under its gaze for its good pleasure, but that it is the fatherland which is being rent asunder by their hands, whilst Gaul and Germany are rising in revolt, and the Empire is on the brink of dissolution. Assuredly such a people was not one to please Tacitus, and he could not have greatly regretted its being deprived of the right of voting the laws in its *comitia* or electing its magistrates at the Field of Mars, nor have made great efforts to restore these rights.

The severity with which he has treated the people might at first suggest the impression that he was a partisan of the aristocratic government, and this, indeed, is the opinion usually formed of him. But it does not require much looking into his books to see that he has hardly more respect for the great lords than for the proletariat. At moments he is revolted by the cowardice of the Senate, and he does not hide his loathing at its eagerness to act as accomplice in all crimes.[2] It might even be said that he takes a pleasure in putting it in absurd situations; when, for example, at the battle of Bedriacum, he describes with perfect frankness its miserable vacillations between Otho and Vitellius, the precautions it takes not to compromise itself, so long as issues remain doubtful, and, once fortune has declared herself, the zeal with which it crushes the vanquished.[3] But nowhere, perhaps, has he better shown his contempt for that degenerate nobility than in the fine narrative he gives us of the conspiracy of Piso.[4] This Piso was a

[1] *Hist.* iii. 83. [2] *Ibid.* i. 45, 85. [3] *Ibid.* ii. 52. [4] *Ann.* xv. 48.

very great lord and an accomplished man of the world, elegant in his manners, affable to his clients, a patron of men of letters, who himself wrote verses, pleaded at the bar, and discoursed before his friends. He excelled in all the exercises of the Field of Mars, and passed for being the best chess-player of his time, a talent which had brought him the friendship of Caligula. For the rest, he was by no means austere in manners, which gave the finishing touch to a popular hero, and, on occasion, mounted the stage to play in tragedy. When it became known that he had determined to rid the Empire of Nero and take his place, there was a general impulse to join in the conspiracy; even debauchees and milksops, who would never have been suspected of such audacity, were to be seen whetting daggers and claiming the honour of striking the first blow. But this outburst of energy suddenly collapsed in the face of peril; fear at once seized on all those who had assumed heroical attitudes in advance. Even before being examined, they hastened to reveal all the secrets of the plot, and to denounce their accomplices. Each of them gave the names of his best friends. Lucan informed against his mother. Tacitus apparently wished to render this weakness more shameful by contrasting with it the death of Epicharis. She was a woman of light character who had been informed, it is not known how, of the conspiracy. To make her speak, she was put to the most refined tortures without its being possible to drag from her any confession. On the morrow, as they were going to recommence and she feared she would no longer have the strength to keep silence, she took off a scarf which girt her bosom and strangled herself in the litter which was bearing her to the tormentor. 'What admirable courage,' says Tacitus, 'in a freed slave, in a woman who, doomed to so awful an ordeal, screened by her fidelity people who were strangers, almost unknown to her, whilst freeborn men of a stronger sex, Roman knights and senators, waited not for tortures to betray in mutual emulation their nearest and dearest.' This account shows that Tacitus did not cherish many illusions on the aristocracy of his time; whatever

might be his respect for the great name of the Senate, I firmly believe he thought that, were power restored to it, it would not invariably perhaps put that power to good use. On the accession of Vespasian some senators attempted to take the opportunity to secure a little more importance for the Senate. Tacitus, who relates this venture, does not appear much in sympathy with it; he speaks of it coldly, and, while awarding high praise to the wisdom and virtues of Helvidius Priscus, he ascribes to his adversary a very reasonable speech, in which, notably, he makes him say, 'that we must always remember in what century and under what government we live, and that, for his part, if he admires the past, he adapts himself to the present.'[1]

To adapt ourselves to our time, to retain the government under which we live, and, even if we regret the past, to resign ourselves to the present—such was, we recall, the conclusion of his first work; it is that also of his last works, and from one end of his life to the other he did not change. The only difference is that at the outset, in the *Dialogue of the Orators*, his resignation had a certain ease and vivacity, more spirit and good-humour; with time it grew more morose. The trials he had gone through, the doings of men, experience of things, rendered him sadder and less confident, but they also confirmed him in the idea that we must not be too exacting and pursue Utopian perfections and consummate forms of government. He whom the world obeyed at that moment was far from faultless, but he at least had the advantage of falling in with temporal necessities: it was one reason for being satisfied with him. Tacitus said so explicitly on two occasions under varying circumstances. The first time, indeed, he puts it in the mouth of one of his personages, and the personage is a prince; but he seems quite to identify himself with the words he ascribes to him. He makes Galba say, on adopting Piso, that he would willingly have re-established the Republic, but that 'the vast fabric of the Empire could not stand erect and in equilibrium without a hand to guide it.'[2] Nothing could be truer: the extent of the

[1] *Hist.* iv. 8.

[2] *Ibid.* i. 16.

Roman dominion, the diversity of the peoples which it contained, the pressure of the barbarians on the frontiers, made unity of command essential. In the other passage he speaks in his own name. At the commencement of the *History*, in summing up the reign of Augustus, he recalls that 'it was the interest of the public peace that led to the concentration of authority in the hand of a single man,'[1] and he does not add that it was wrong so to do; he accordingly accepts the monarchy as Augustus made it, or, if you will,[2] he resigns himself to it. It was not an ideal government like those of which the philosophers paint us enchanting pictures in their works. Like all things human it had its qualities and defects; but, in virtue of its very defects and by its qualities, it was the only one appropriate to a society of which he says that 'it can support neither complete liberty nor complete servitude.'

V

What may be lacking to the judgment of Tacitus on the Cæsars. Has he not been too absorbed in moral considerations? Has he not confined himself too strictly to Rome? Has he taken sufficient account of the condition of provinces and the administration of the Empire? Whence arises the difference between the ancient historians and those of to-day in their verdict on the imperial régime?

Before closing this long inquiry on the degree of confidence which can be accorded to Tacitus, let us recall in a word or two the conclusions to which it leads us. It is not merely a question of pointing out in his works certain defects in detail: no historical book—least of all among the ancients—is exempt from such minor errors. We wish to know if it were true, as alleged, that he calumniated the Cæsars. The inquiry is one of importance, for in this case the reproaches heaped upon some men reflect on a whole political system; in condemning the Emperors we discredit

[1] *Hist.* i. 1. *Omnem potestatem ad unum conferri pacis interfuit.*

[2] *Tacitus ist Monarchist, aber aus Noth, man könnte sagen aus Verzweiflung.* Mommsen, *Berlin Academy*, 1886.

the Empire. I have endeavoured to make it clear that there was nothing, either in the birth of Tacitus, in his character, in his connections, or, above all, in his opinions, that would necessarily have made him an enemy to the princes whose history he wrote, and withheld him from seeing and telling the truth about them. What satisfies us that he told it, is that the other historians of the time are in agreement with him, and judge them as he did himself. It can, then, be affirmed, I think, that he kept his promise to speak of events and men 'without favour and without hate.'

I account to myself, however, and would fain have it understood, why sound intellects have been mistaken in him, and why, considering his honesty and sincerity, he has inspired so much distrust. The reason appears to me to be that, if the portrait he has drawn of the Cæsars be exact so far as it goes, it is not complete; one whole side has remained in shadow, which, without slurring over altogether, he illuminates less than the rest; and it is this, on the contrary, which present-day historians are most inclined to put in the light. Thus their judgments differ from his, because they do not take the same point of view as that at which he stood. There is no formal contradiction here, but a sort of misunderstanding which it is possible, I believe, to dissipate.

To be sure of comprehending the reason for the judgments of Tacitus, we must not forget the conception of history formed by the ancient and especially the Roman historians. They regarded it as, before all else, a school of morals. Livy expressly says so at the opening of his great work: 'What is most salutary and most profitable in the contemplation of the past is the examples and lessons which it affords us. With a vividness which impresses all eyes, it demonstrates what it is useful we should do in the interest of the State and in our own, and, by the representation of bad or impious deeds, it instructs us what to avoid.'[1] Sallust is less explicit; he is content to say at the beginning of the *Jugurtha* that 'the narration of the things of the past is very useful.' Upon the nature of the services it may render, he does not

[1] Livy, pref.

enlarge, 'for fear of seeming to glorify his own profession.' But it is quite plain that, had he been less reticent, he would have spoken like Livy. Tacitus is as clear as possible. 'The principal merit of history,' he says, 'is to preserve the virtues from oblivion, and to hold out the reprobation of posterity as a terror to iniquitous words and deeds.'[1] And elsewhere, in a more definite manner still: 'Few men distinguish by their own lights what is honest from what is criminal, what is beneficial from what is hurtful. The examples of others form the school for the greatest number.'[2]

There has been much opposition in our days to this manner of conceiving history. Nothing, however, seems to me more natural. From the moment it is agreed that the study of the past has another end than the entertainment of the curious, there is a tendency to make it serve for the moral education of the present. Horace's father taught his son good behaviour by pointing out to him as an example the humble people of the neighbourhood, and Horace appears to have profited well by this method. When history is true, that is to say, alive, the events of the past seem as though of yesterday, and the ancients become our contemporaries. Little by little we familiarise ourselves with them; soon they are for us what the neighbours were for Horace, and we apply to ourselves the reflections which their life suggests to us. Whether we wish it or not we find it hard to refrain from moralising with history. I recognise, however, that some discretion should be used. An historian too bent on being instructive might be led, in order to render his lesson more impressive, to make his good people better and his bad people worse than they actually were. It is quite likely that Livy may not have entirely escaped this fallacy. The best course is to relate the facts as precisely as we can, and then to leave it to the reader to extract from this actual reflection of life the lessons which it seems to suggest. We can rest assured that he will always derive some lesson.

These lessons will probably vary somewhat in nature. Since

[1] *Ann.* iii. 65. [2] *Ibid.* iv. 33.

history, by the variety of its narrations, affords us an insight into man under all aspects, following him even into the incidents of his subjective life, it is legitimate to seek in it for lessons in general morals; but as it more especially exhibits him engaged in public affairs as citizen and magistrate, it seems natural that it should, before all else, be political. This is what it has specially come to be in our own time. Politics certainly occupy a large place in ancient history also, since that history has primarily to relate the struggles of nations with one another and their internal revolutions; yet this is not the side to which ancient history of itself inclines. When Tacitus says that 'it teaches us to distinguish what is honest from what is criminal, what is beneficial from what is hurtful,' he refers to the instruction it affords for everyday life; and he states it still more explicitly when he adds that 'it is the school for the greatest number.' The Roman historians were, then, rather moralists than politicians. An exception must not be made even for Sallust. No doubt a revolutionist like him, compromised in seditions, discredited by untoward friendships, seemed hardly destined to become a professor of ethics, and yet he overflows with morality. Putting aside his virtuous tirades and his regrets for the past, he hardly gives us more, in drawing the portrait of Catilina, than the details of his crimes. It is well to know them, but we should prefer to know exactly what he counted on doing, and what form of government he proposed to set up. When Sallust sets forth the causes leading to the decline of the Republic, he says nothing of the disappearance of the middle class, he hardly mentions the absorption of the small estates in the great, or the detestable recruitment of the citizens to slavery; but he insists upon the love of pleasures and the pride, *luxuria et superbia*, and the scourge which seems to him most threatening for the future is the insatiable desire of self-aggrandizement, *avaritia*. He is certainly not in error, but we plainly see that it was the moral causes of the Roman decadence which impressed him most. His work is not, then, though it has been called it, a political history.

That of Tacitus is more so. Side by side with that profusion of acute and profound reflections, of delicate psychological analyses, which display his knowledge of human nature, there are broad views to be found in which the statesman is revealed and from which the politicians of all ages have profited. It is he—the remark has been made—who is most often quoted, even in our own days, in the Parliaments where the people's interests are being discussed. He has a perfect acquaintance with his country's political history; he has studied the spheres of the various magistracies; he relates their origin and vicissitudes, and everywhere he mingles with general ideas accurate data, which show that he has handled public affairs and is not ignorant of their working. This is apparent, for instance, in the admirable prologue he has prefixed to his *History*. . He begins by sketching out in two or three chapters an outline of his theme. He is going to narrate one of the most awe-inspiring revolutions which Rome has experienced. The last of the Cæsars having abruptly disappeared, the discovery has been made, when a successor is wanted, that there is no settled and defined constitution; that the State has been living on fictions and compromises: 'the Empire's secret has been revealed.' No longer is authority to be anywhere found; the legions have mutinied; the spirit of the provinces has apparently awakened; all the machinery which looked so solid has cracked, and we are suddenly confronted by the great catastrophe, which, five centuries later, is to overwhelm all. One understands the emotion which seizes on Tacitus at this memory, to which is to be added the terror of the gloomy years of Domitian just traversed. In this introduction of incomparable grandeur the statesman already stands revealed; but he displays in still greater measure his ordinary gifts as a psychologist and a writer. Here are other qualities to which we are less accustomed. To enable us to grasp the gravity of the situation, he leads us with him throughout the Empire in the course of eight whole chapters, and puts before us 'the condition of Rome, the spirit of the armies, the state of the provinces, that of the whole world, and what portions of that vast

fabric are sound, what portions diseased.' This picture delineated with strokes at once broad and precise, which, together with general surveys, comprises so many exact details, so many facts, so many comments on the distribution of the legions and Rome's manner of ruling the peoples, is something new. Properly to appreciate its novelty let us think of the preambles of Sallust, which are mere platitudes. The contrast will clearly indicate even that the commencement of political history, that is to say of modern history, is already to be felt at times in Tacitus.[1]

It was just this which gave him his vogue when he awoke with all the others at the Renaissance.[2] As he happened to have related, very much in spite of himself, the inside intrigues of the Palatine, the squabbles of mistresses, great lords and freedmen, fighting among themselves for the prince's favour, it was deemed indispensable to know him in order to become an accomplished courtier. Never was he more studied, more annotated, more expounded than then.[3] It was in him that statesmen schooled themselves; his works were ransacked for lessons in what was called politics, that is to say the art of disguising feelings, of devising dexterous deceptions, of ingeniously beguiling one's enemies, on occasion one's friends. In the petty Italian courts Tiberius had come to be the model affected by those

[1] In this description of the state of the Empire one feature is missing: Tacitus says nothing of the finances. It was not that they did not have their importance in the revolution to which Nero succumbed, nor that the Romans held them in small account. Augustus was very careful to present the budget of the Empire to the Senate (Suetonius, *Caligula*, 20). If Tiberius, who in all things liked secrecy, kept it to himself, he showed no less solicitude in dealing with the financial question. (See the skilful manner in which he saved Rome from financial disaster. *Ann.*, vi. 17.) Tacitus has made amends for his neglect of finances here, by what he recounts a little later as to the proceedings taken to make restitution of the five hundred millions which Nero had squandered in mad liberalities. (*Hist.* i. 20.)

[2] The first edition of the complete works of Tacitus was in 1470; but for several years past scholars had known and studied him. In the second half of the fourteenth century Boccaccio had read the conclusion of the *Annals* and the *History* and he imitated them in his works. (See *Boccace et Tacite* by M. de Nolhac in the *Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Ecole française de Rome*, t. xii.)

[3] Amelot de la Houssaye in the preface to his Tacitus mentions fourteen of these commentaries, which appeared in the course of a few years, and the authors of which were nearly all Italians.

little village tyrants, and their one object in reading the *Annals* was to learn to behave like him. This was a strange distortion of the intentions of Tacitus, which did not prevent readers from swearing by him alone, and insisting on learning, when reading him, what he had no thought of teaching.

For he too, taking him in his work as a whole, and not in a few isolated passages, was in reality a moralist rather than a politician. To be convinced of this, we have but to note what specially gratifies him in the history of the past, the subjects to which he feels most attraction, which he treats of heartily and in great detail: unfortunately what he slurs over can also be perceived. Thence, in fact, befall him, along with great beauties, regrettable lacunæ; here is one which appears to me to have had grave consequences. At the end of the prologue to the history, which I have just quoted, Tacitus speaks of the provinces; and it would have been difficult to abstain from saying something on this occasion, since the movement that overthrew Nero proceeded from a province. But, as a rule, he is little concerned about them. It is Rome that attracts him and holds him fast. He certainly tells us that he is revolted by what goes on there, he complains that 'nothing is to be beheld but scenes of mourning, denunciations, punishments, betrayals of friends by friends, trials which have all the same purpose and the same issue'; but, whatever indignation these spectacles may cause him, it appears as though he cannot tear himself away from them: all the interest of his narrative is concentrated upon them. It is grudgingly that he resigns himself from time to time to lose sight of the Palatine, to follow up the legions when they advance to attack the foe; the year at an end, whatever the gravity of the operations in progress, he generally interrupts his relation and returns to Rome on New Year's day, to install the consuls who are to give their names to the year, and to plunge anew in those court intrigues the vileness and monotony of which he deplores. Had he only made a longer stay in the provinces, had he only consented to study them from nearer at hand and with more attention, it may be that the

opinion he had of his era would have been slightly modified. He would have seen that there—that is to say in the greater part of the Empire—the manners were simpler, the life less dissolute than at Rome and in its vicinity. Corruption seemed to decrease in ratio as the great city was left behind. Italy already was worthier, Gaul and Spain better still; even the least commendable proconsuls dispatched thither, Petronius or Vitellius, improved in that healthier atmosphere. And not only were the provinces more virtuous, they were happier. The catastrophes which appalled Roman society reacted but feebly upon them: 'the good princes profited the whole world, the bad only burdened their neighbours.' This saying, as we have already seen, is one of Tacitus; but it is only an observation dropped in passing; and truly it is not enough. He ought to have insisted on it further and recurred to it more frequently; he would have afforded us a better comprehension of how it happens to-day that in the ancient Roman provinces, in Gaul, in Spain, in Africa, we come across so many monuments erected in all sincerity by private individuals and municipalities 'for the salvation and preservation' of the same Emperors against whom conspiracies were being daily hatched at Rome. At the same time it would facilitate our solving a problem which obsesses us while we are reading the works of Tacitus, and to which, it seems to me, he has given no adequate response: how came it to pass that the Empire could survive the succession of bad Emperors from Tiberius to Vespasian? Evidently it was that the provinces did not suffer so much as Rome. Those princes, detestable as they were, and detested by those around them, did not govern the provinces badly. Tiberius and Domitian were even good administrators, who chose intelligent procurators and legates and kept an eye upon them. Under madmen, like Caligula and Nero, affairs went on their ordinary course from the impulse already received. Rome was a country of tradition where good habits had less chance of falling into disuse. There were, moreover, beneath the great personages, whom the master's favour set one day in the front rank, but who did not remain there,

inferior officials whose very humbleness protected them from the changeable humour of the prince, and who maintained some order and consistency through so many vagaries and follies. Statius speaks of a freedman of the imperial house, who was a sort of minister of finance (*a rationibus*) under seven or eight princes, and only suffered a light and brief interval of disfavour at the age of eighty under Domitian.[1] It was perhaps by the cares of such obscure persons, whose names are rarely mentioned by Tacitus, that good habits were preserved. Thanks to them, the prudently administered provinces remained peaceful and prosperous, whilst at Rome all was going from bad to worse. Then too the provinces were in a position to come generously to her aid, paying back with interest what they had received from her; they gave her soldiers, officers, magistrates, financiers, administrators and statesmen, who replaced the worn-out staff of the old political world, revived the ancient aristocracy in course of extinction, filled the gaps made by the cruelty of the Cæsars, and for three centuries checked the ruin of the Empire.

Thus the Empire, according as she is viewed from Rome or the provinces, has not quite the same aspect, and the judgment passed on her differs; whilst the moralist who keeps his eyes fixed on the Palatine or the Senate, and sees nothing but the frightful scenes in progress there, condemns her without pity, the politician, who specially studies the way in which she ruled the world, is disposed to treat her more favourably. The divergence of their opinions is thus to be explained. The standpoint from which they make their observations not being the same, each perceives but half of the truth; to restore it to its entirety, it behoves us to bring them together and complete them one by the other.

[1] Statius, *Silv.* iii. 3. Continuous service in the same offices under different Emperors must have been less rare than is supposed. It was thus that Titinius Capito, Pliny's friend, a former military tribune, was successively Secretary of State (*procurator ab epistolis*) under Domitian, then under Nerva, and under Trajan. Tacitus, absorbed in those who play the leading parts—Sejanus, Macro, Tigellinus—scarcely ever deigns to speak of what he calls *interior potentia*, that is of the freedmen of the house of the Cæsars whom a prince inherited from his predecessors with all the rest of his fortune. It was, however, these men, forgotten and unknown, who very often carried on the Empire.

It seems to me that in principle Tacitus would not have refused to do this. Whatever be his hatred of the Cæsars, he does not conceal the fact that of themselves, or under the inspiration of prudent counsellors, they have done both wise and useful things. He has accorded ample justice to the government of Tiberius during the first nine years—those *Tiberii Cæsaris prima tempora*,[1] which Seneca regarded as almost a golden age; he mentions with approval some good laws, some wise measures, of Claudius, and even of Nero, which are still in vigorous operation in his time. It is not, then, quite fair to allege that Tacitus and the historians of his school ignore the good done by Tiberius and his successors; the only thing is that in their capacity of moralists they are more interested in the crimes committed by those princes, and leave the services they rendered somewhat too much in the shade. On the other hand, the politicians are tempted to have eyes only for those services, and, without denying their crimes—only too well authenticated and certain—they are involuntarily led to draw a veil over them, to whittle them down; they seek explanations and excuses. It is clear, as I have already stated, that between one and other there is no express contradiction or radical opposition, and that it is possible to combine them. I confess, however, that, if a choice must be made, I range myself with those who rather incline to Tacitus. He at least has the merit of being unwilling to admit that there are any special privileges for heads of the State and politicians, that they have a right to more indulgence than others, and that the laws of ordinary morality are not made for everybody; which is at bottom the thought of those who pardon the Cæsars.

VI

The use made of Tacitus at the epoch of the French Revolution. Madame Roland. *Le Vieux Cordelier* of Camille Desmoulins.

Tacitus was not only convinced that his severity was just, he

[1] Seneca, *De Clem.* 1.

considered it efficacious. He had been impressed still more than we by that uninterrupted series of bad Emperors, and must have told himself that chance was not entirely to blame; so much the less so, since some had at the outset appeared to be estimable persons, and in the early days had been favourably judged. It might be that they were not altogether depraved by nature and necessarily condemned to be what they became. In whatever position destiny might have put him, Tiberius would never have been an amiable man; he had in him the insolent and sullen humour of the Appii Claudii, his ancestors, what Cicero called *appietas*; but had he been only a senator like the others, it is highly probable that he would have ranked among the most enlightened and most skilful administrators of his time. By taking a little trouble an antiquary and scholar could be made of Claudius; Nero himself, albeit he had only a wisp of a voice, by dint of taking lessons from Terpnos, following a severe regimen, and laying a sheet of lead on his chest,[1] might have attained the reputation of a fairly good singer and merited the applause of indulgent hearers. It was the Empire that ruined them; they were the first victims of that absolute power with which they tyrannised over others; that sovereign authority, which had once permitted all and made them dread all, was truly that which shook their whole being and expelled the good instincts of their nature: *vi dominationis convulsus et mutatus.*[2] Hardly one of those unhappy princes resisted it; all the imperial dynasties, those even which had begun best, ended badly. The Flavii were dishonoured by Domitian, the Antonines by Commodus, the Severi by Caracalla. To eradicate this disease of insanity and inhumanity, to which all these families succumbed, Tacitus thought it was first of all essential to lay it bare. He has shown with all the vigour of his genius what that disease makes of the man it enslaves, and it is thus that he has drawn those figures, unforgettable once we have beheld them.

[1] *Cœpit . . . plumbeam chartam supinus pectore sustinere, et clystere vomituque purgari, et abstinere pomis cibisque officientibus.* (Suetonius, *Nero*, 20.)

[2] *Ann.* vi. 48.

The lesson, no doubt, was intended for a certain period and a certain society. But this is not to say that it only applies thereto, and that others cannot profit from it also. It sometimes happens that history repeats itself: circumstances return to what they were in the time of Tacitus, and then his narrations may resume a fearful reality. Montaigne already perceived the special utility of reading them 'in a sick and troubled state of things,' as was that gloomy close of the sixteenth century. 'You might say,' he tells us, 'that he paints us and that he pinches us.' But it was, above all, in the evil days of the French Revolution that he was remembered and that his pictures came to life again. Up till then Plutarch and Livy had been read by preference; all the first generation had been bred up on them. They put Sparta and Rome in fashion, and inspired their simple admirers with the idea of restoring the France of Louis XV. to the virtues of the old republics. But when dreams were passed by for realities, when party quarrels and unbridled hatreds were raging, it was indeed time to discard these idylls and leave the Rome of Fabricius and Cato for the Rome of the Cæsars. Madame Roland had been nourished on Plutarch in her youth; it was in him that she imbibed those impressions and ideas, 'which,' she tells us, 'made me republican without my dreaming of it.' But with time she changed her reading. From Sainte-Pélagie, where she was imprisoned, she wrote to a friend just a month before mounting the scaffold: 'I have got a sort of passion for Tacitus; I am reading him for the fourth time in my life with an entirely new relish; I shall know him by heart, I cannot go to bed without having enjoyed some pages.' We perceive too, more than once, in reading her *Memoirs* that she has him before her or in her mind. When the wild din of the street, which reaches her through the windows of her prison, tears her from the memories of the past in which she fain would spend her last hours, she dreams of the age of the Cæsars, which these scenes recall to her: 'Terrible days of the reign of Tiberius, we behold your horrors born anew! . . . Let us flee from this ill-starred epoch, comparable to the reign of

Tiberius. Live for me again, O peaceful moments of my tender youth!'[1]

It is more especially to the *Vieux Cordelier* that the name of Tacitus remains attached during the Revolutionary period. Camille Desmoulins had received at the Collège Louis-le-Grand a good classical education. He knew his Latin authors well and often quoted them, notably Cicero, for whom, in his capacity as a future advocate in the Parliament, he seemed to profess a particular esteem. He had also, no doubt, read Tacitus and must have admired him, but probably with that school admiration which leaves the heart cold and is only attached to literary qualities. How could the people of that epoch have fully understood him? They were disciples of Jean-Jacques, who believed man good in himself and only spoiled by civilisation. Like him they looked for the happiness of the world from a return to the state of nature. And lo! on a sudden came terrible events, brutally to upset this optimism; the roar of the human beast was to be heard, unshackled from the bonds that cowed it, and given over to its instincts for carnage. It was natural, then, that there should be a leaning to the writers who had seen it in those violent crises, and had depicted the excesses into which it let itself be hurried. I imagine that it was at this particular juncture that Camille Desmoulins must have read Tacitus again, and soaked himself in him. He is full of him, he knows him by heart like Madame Roland, he quotes him on every occasion. He has had no difficulty in perceiving while reading him that all despotisms are alike, whencesoever they proceed, and that, in castigating the tyranny of the Cæsars, Tacitus is depicting to the life that of the mob, which is no better. What

[1] It was almost in this way that Garat, when he was cast into prison, discovered Seneca. He tells us that when he read him for the first time he had difficulty in finishing the reading, but that now he had difficulty in tearing himself from it. 'There no longer remained but one thing for us to learn: to die. That is practically the whole philosophy of Seneca. . . . He has created a philosophy for those lingering agonies to which tyrants at times doom the nations. . . . There is need of a philosophy which shall teach you to renounce all goods before they are torn from you, which shall sever you from the human race—which can do no more for you, and for which you can no longer do aught or hope aught—and which prepares you for the moment when Silvanus shall come to tell you from Nero: "Die!"'

difference is there between the law of majesty and the law of suspects, and has not one caused as much blood to flow as the other? Does the Revolutionary Tribunal proceed in any other fashion than that of the Senate in its bad days? Neither grants pardon to any one, any more than either requires proof in order to condemn; the execution follows straight upon the sentence. If at Paris the Terror has been solemnly constituted the order of the day, it did not the less reign at Rome, and the lineaments under which Camille Desmoulins describes it equally befit both countries. 'They transformed to crimes,' he tells us, 'simple glances, compassion, nay, silence even. It was compulsory to exhibit joy on the death of a friend, a kinsman, if one did not wish to run the risk of perishing oneself. Under Nero, several, whose nearest and dearest had been put to death, went to offer thanks to the gods for it; they illuminated their houses. It was at least essential to wear an air of contentment, a calm and open countenance, there was fear lest fear itself might imply guilt.' The circumstances being so far the same, Camille Desmoulins had but to select from Tacitus some well-chosen quotations to arraign his own time. It was a convenient means of suggesting what could not be averred. Had he openly preached pity to those infuriated beings, he would have risked not having a hearing; they would not have brooked open reproach for the crimes they were said to commit. None would have dared to lead them to the plain of Terreaux, blood-stained by volleys of grapeshot, or upon the Place de la Révolution; but it was possible to unfold before their eyes 'that river of blood, that sewer of corruption and filth which flowed perpetually at Rome during the reign of the Cæsars,' and in this circuitous fashion all could be said. This was what Camille did in that third number of the *Vieux Cordelier*, which has so often been quoted and is a masterpiece of energy and courage. The effect was prodigious. It was snatched up in the streets, the bookseller's shop where it was on sale was besieged, and Camille could boast of having flashed a ray of hope into the overcrowded prisons. But on the other hand those who had packed them thus and meant to empty

them by death alone, were displeased, and, at Robespierre's request, the third number of the *Vieux Cordelier* was burnt at the Jacobins.

Camille Desmoulins was not intimidated thereby. On the contrary he seemed day by day to wax more active and more violent in his desperate struggle. He ceased to veil his invectives under historical allusions, however transparent they might be; he quitted Rome for Paris, and openly denounced the men of his time, indicating them by name. Yet he did not altogether desist from quoting Tacitus. Up till the end he made him serve to counsel clemency, to defend reason and humanity. In his seventh number, which was the last, where he sets forth his political creed, he summons him again to his aid to prove to his foes, as a supreme contumely, that their inhumanity exceeds that of the Cæsars:

'I hold that liberty does not require that the corpse of one condemned should be beheaded,[1] for Tiberius said, "The suc cession of those of the condemned who have the courage to slay themselves shall not be confiscated, and shall remain to their family, as a thankoffering which I make them for having spared me the pain of sending them to execution."—And that was Tiberius!

'I believe that liberty does not confound the wife or the mother of the guilty person with the guilty person himself, for Nero did not cast Seneca into solitary confinement; he did not sever him from his dear Paulina, and when he learnt that that virtuous woman had opened her veins with her husband, he sent off his physician post-haste, to lavish on her the ministrations of his art and to recall her to life.—And that was Nero!'

We can understand how these eloquent protestations kindled the fury of the Jacobins. It no longer sufficed them on this occasion to burn the number which contained them. They arraigned the author before the Revolutionary Tribunal, which

[1] Barbaroux and, later, Robespierre, wounded and dying, were carried to the guillotine and beheaded.

sent him straight to the scaffold, to teach him to go searching in the ancient historians for lessons of justice and mercy.

On that day, sixteen centuries after his death, Tacitus found realised the idea which he gives us of history, when he associates it with morality, and would make it, to use his own expression, the conscience of humanity.

THE SCHOOLS OF DECLAMATION AT ROME

THE SCHOOLS OF DECLAMATION AT ROME

SENECA the father's book on declamation, despite the interest it affords, is little known to the public. It has not been translated into French since 1663, when it was done very badly, and I do not believe there exists a single version in any foreign language. The fact is that it is a difficult task, well calculated to daunt the most intrepid translator. One of our young professors, M. Bornecque, has had the courage to undertake it, and the Académie française has judged him successful by awarding him the more important part of the Jules Janin prize.[1] He has had in the first instance to apply himself to his author's text, which is very corrupt in the manuscripts. He has profited by the emendations made in Germany during the past few years, and he adds his own. He has done into lucid French the harsh and obscure Latin; he has completed his work by short annotations, clear and full of exact details; in short has made Seneca readable for us, which is a great service. We feel in taking him up for the first time that we are merely going to satisfy a curiosity; and it turns out, when we have finished, that we have resolved some of the most subtle problems in the history of ancient letters. Nothing, I believe, will be easier than to make this clear.

I

Oratorical education among the ancient Romans. Cato's rhetoric. The introduction of Greek rhetoric at Rome.

Renan, in receiving M. de Lesseps at the French Academy, observed to him: 'You have a horror of rhetoric, and you are

[1] *Sénèque le rhéteur. Controverses et suasoires:* a new translation by Henri Bornecque; Garnier, 1902.

quite right; it was, with poetics, the sole error of the Greeks. After achieving masterpieces they fancied they could lay down rules for their production: profound fallacy! There is no art of speaking any more than there is an art of writing. To speak well is to think aloud. Oratorical and literary success has never but one cause, absolute sincerity.'

Renan is in error; there is an art of speaking and an art of writing. No doubt, whether we speak or whether we write, sincerity is essential. We must never say aught but what we think, but thinking and saying are not the same thing. Experience proves, on the contrary, that it is very rare to succeed at the first attempt in exactly expressing what we think, as we think it and as we feel it. Sometimes speech is too inadequate to interpret the thought, sometimes it overshoots the mark in its effort to compass it. It is certain that sincerity and conviction are of great utility to the speaker, but they do not suffice him. Were it only necessary to be convinced of being right to make others share our opinion, plaintiffs would have no need to provide themselves with an advocate; they would plead their cause better in person. Rhetoric has been so greatly abused that it is naturally distrusted, but it is not condemned to being necessarily an art of misrepresentation. There is also an art of presenting the truth which renders it more persuasive, and this art can be taught like all the others.

The Greeks knew it well, and it was because they did, that they invented rhetoric. How it was born among them, at what epoch, in what form, and what character it derived from its origin, is a very interesting study well fitted to make us understand them; but I must not deal with this here.[1] I shall confine myself to speaking of Rome.

At Rome, as in all the free cities, speech had great importance. It was not, in the earlier days at least, a literary amateur's diversion; people did not speak for the sake of speaking, they spoke in

[1] On this subject the excellent *Histoire de la Littérature grecque* of MM. Alfred and Maurice Croiset may be consulted.

order to act (*agere causam, actio*). Small solicitude being affected for style, they did not trouble to write out orations in advance so as to repeat them by heart. Even in the time of Cicero there was surprise at Hortensius having done so when he defended Messalla.[1] The case concluded, they thought no more of it, and it was only somewhat later that they had the idea of rewriting the speech after its delivery, either for the instruction of those who had not heard it, or to preserve its memory for posterity.

It was not, however, possible that with time there should not be a tendency to make certain reflections and observations upon the marvellous effects produced by speech, to be noticed in the public assemblies. It was perceived from the first that, as a rule, the orators did not at once succeed, and that several, whose first appearance had been very commonplace, later secured a hearing and applause. It was naturally concluded that some sort of apprenticeship was not unprofitable, that one could be trained for public speaking as for other things, and probably by the same methods, that is to say by practice and precept. A kind of special education was therefore devised for the use of those who aimed at a political career. Tacitus tells us that the young man who wished to learn public speaking was taken by his father or one of his relatives, when he had completed his elementary studies, to some orator of renown, whose house he regularly visited and to whom he listened when he spoke to the people or before the judges, 'thus learning war upon the field of battle'; and this appears to Tacitus much better than going and shutting oneself up in the rhetoric schools as was usual in his time.[2] Later, when young men, formed by this discipline, had become orators in their turn, when they defended their clients in the courts, when they spoke at the Forum and the Senate, other reflections must have occurred to their minds. It was not hard to realise that there were certain ways of treating the public and leading it to its sentiments, and when the situation seemed the same, they had no hesitation in availing themselves of those with which they had succeeded on

[1] Cicero, *Brutus*, 96. [2] Tacitus, *De Orat.* 34.

some previous occasion. There was, then, no orator who did not have his methods, that is to say his rhetoric; only in primitive times each had his own, which he had not learnt at school but evolved for his own particular use. Cato, who in this matter must have had more experience than any one else, having so often been accuser and accused, conceived the idea of communicating to others the observations he had made for his own benefit. That singular man, who had taken on himself to be the tenacious defender of the past, was in reality an innovator, and, at times, anticipated the future. One might almost say that that peasant had the temperament of a man of letters or a journalist. Nothing pleased him more than addressing the public, and just as he had confided to it his hygiene and medicine, he also acquainted it with his rhetoric. Of his little work, the first written in Latin on the subject,[1] there survive to us but two phrases, yet, according to a commentator's saying, these are two divine phrases. The first is the famous definition of an orator repeated by the whole of antiquity, *vir bonus dicendi peritus;* the other is not less fine, not less profound, and inspired Boileau and Fénelon: 'Grasp your subject well,' he says, 'and the words shall follow, *rem tene, verba sequentur.*'

About the same time, as relations grew more intimate between Rome and Greece, the Romans commenced their acquaintance with Greek rhetoric and rhetors.[2] Probably it was the Gracchi who introduced them at Rome; as they addressed themselves to the popular passions, they must have been on the look-out for all that could give eloquence more power. Tiberius had been brought up by Diophanes of Mitylene, and Caius was censured for having recourse to the advice and talents of Menelaus of Marathus and certain others.[3] So long as the Greek rhetors remained in the houses of great lords, there was scarce any means of molesting them. But when they wanted to establish themselves in the city,

[1] Quintilian, iii. 1, 19.

[2] See for further details the essay on the 'Introduction of Greek Rhetoric at Rome' in the *Mélanges Perrot.*

[3] Cicero, *Brutus*, 26.

and open schools, it was forbidden them. They were brutally expelled a first time in the company of the philosophers.[1] Seventy years later a no less rigorous edict was promulgated by the censors, Licinius Crassus and Domitius Ahenobarbus, two very important persons, to prohibit the teaching of rhetoric in Latin. But all these attempts at repression were vain. Nothing could rebuff these 'little Greeks' who returned unobtrusively and in greater numbers after being put to the door; no one ever scored over their pliancy and persistency. It was just from the edict of the censors that the final triumph of rhetoric dated. Up to the time of Sylla the teachers were all freedmen and aliens, 'to such an extent,' says an author, 'that it seemed shameful to teach what it was honourable to learn.' At this juncture a Roman knight, Plotius Gallus, opened a school and taught there in Latin, though it had just been forbidden. Pupils flocked to this school, and they attended it more especially to exercise themselves in 'declaiming,' that is to say in treating subjects resembling actual causes pleaded before the courts. From the first day 'declamation' obtained the highest success at Rome.[2] Even out of the school it was the fashion, and great personages did not disdain to practise it. When Pompey learns that Cæsar is preparing to attack him, he applies himself to rehearsing declamation at home, so as to qualify himself for the struggle, as though the battle were to be fought in the Senate. It was considered in the sequel that he had done better to muster the legions. On the return from Pharsalia, Cicero, who no longer had anything to do, assembled in his home certain of Cæsar's officers, Hirtius and Dolabella, whom the war had withdrawn from rhetoric, and who were anxious to recover it. They were, he said, his big scholars, and he made them declaim under his direction. Cicero always loved

[1] Suetonius, *De gramm. et rhet.* 25.

[2] It must be clearly understood that this word *declamation* is accepted here in the sense of oratorical exercise which it had at Rome, and that it must not be given the signification of trite and emphatic speech which it has among ourselves. Nevertheless among the Romans it was sometimes taken in a derogatory sense. This intention is marked, for instance, in the famous verse of Juvenal: *ut pueris placeas et declamatio fias.*

young men even when they had the failings of youth, and he asked nothing better than to forget his age in their company. Those who had to get their own back for the hardships of the war, led a joyous life. Cicero required no great pressing to join in their pleasures. 'I teach them the art of speaking well,' he said, 'they are my masters in the art of dining well.'

It was therefore towards the close of the Republic and at the opening of the reign of Augustus, that declamation acquired at Rome the importance it retained until the last days of the Empire.

II

Declamation at Rome. The success it obtained there. The declamations of the pupils. The declamations of the masters.

We find, then, rhetoric installed at Rome, where it very speedily acclimatised itself. The Romans were not inventors, they took their whole literature from Greece; but what they imitated they turned to their own uses and stamped with their impression. They accordingly preserved all through a certain originality, and never ceased to be themselves. How did they arrive at the teaching of eloquence?

The art of speaking can be taught in two ways: by theory and practice. The Greeks seem to have preferred theory. Predisposed above all else to speculation, always in quest of the reason of things, more for the sake of the quest than for the knowledge to be gained, they turned rhetoric into a complicated science, involved and learned, which contained many profound and ingenious observations, but also many fine-spun theories and idle diversions, in which certain problems are stated and discussed which are not worth solution. This science the Romans did not neglect. Amongst them it was studied by eminent masters, Cicero, Quintilian, and many others whose works are lost. Nevertheless they sometimes criticised it with severity. The author of the *Rhetoric to Herennius*, who prides himself on being a zealous patriot, detects in it many

futilities and much twaddle, and says so in plain terms.[1] Quintilian, with more consideration, also insinuates this, when, after having respectfully rehearsed the divisions, subdivisions and definitions of the Greek rhetoricians, Roman common sense resuming the upper hand, he asks his reader's pardon 'for having been more prolix than was necessary.'[2] It is evident then, that, while giving a large place to theoretical instruction, the Roman masters did not conceal from themselves its defects; they considered that the most efficient method to accustom young men to public speaking was to make them speak, and with this there was universal agreement. From the outset practical exercises were the popular thing. Those who first opened schools gave their pupils what they called *theses* to deal with, that is to say general questions such as these: is it better to marry or remain a bachelor? which is preferable—to live in the country or the town? should we take part in public affairs or only mind our own business? A little later the *theses* were replaced by *causes*, which signified, no doubt, that the subjects treated at the school resembled those pleaded before the judges; then, all at once, there was no longer any question of *theses* or *causes*; and we are told of *suasoriæ*, of *controversiæ*, and the scholastic exercise by which children are trained to speak assumes the name of *declamatio*, which in this sense is new.[3] If a need were felt of changing the name, it was probably because the thing also had changed, but no one informs us in what the change consisted, and it is impossible to determine it for certain.[4] We can only conjecture that it must have been of some importance, and that it was of a nature entirely to satisfy the public, since its success was so rapid and so complete.

[1] *Rhet. ad Her.* i. 1.

[2] Quintilian, iii. 2, 21.

[3] In the *Rhetoric to Herennius* (iii. 11, 20; 12, 20) it is used in the sense which it has kept among us of a course of elocution. It really seems that it was in the time of Cicero's youth that it acquired its new signification (*Brutus*, 90).

[4] Declamation was practised thus in the Greek schools, but Seneca seems to say that it was not of the same fashion as at Rome. Declamation at Rome must have taken a new and more Roman character. What apparently proves this is that all the words denoting the exercises are Latin.

Fathers of families and young men were especially delighted with it. What Quintilian tells us of the fathers of that period shows that they much resembled those of to-day.[1] They thought highly of their children, they detected wit in all their sallies, they repeated their funny sayings, they admired their prattle, and, as they were never tired of listening to them, they wished the master to give them opportunities of securing a hearing. They insisted accordingly on their being made to declaim as often as possible, and took no interest in the recitals save when their sons were to hold forth; the rest was indifferent to them. It was thus that declamation ended by absorbing nearly the whole of the pupils' time at school.

When the pupil arrives at the rhetor's about the age of thirteen or fourteen, he has come from the hands of the grammarian, who has taught him to the best of his ability all usually learnt with us up to the close of the second class. Latterly he has been prepared for the instruction which the rhetor is to give him, and which is regarded as the crown of studies. He impatiently looks forward to being really put to rhetoric, and especially to his having to declaim. Only think that, upon the day when he takes part in this exercise, he will be, instead of a pupil, an orator who is heard and applauded. Amid the excitement of the youthful audience the master gives out the theme for the declamation; then, having announced it, he explains it. He points out what is its nature, of what developments it is susceptible, if it be necessary to bring the protagonists themselves on the scene and suppose them defending their own interests, or if it be preferable to keep them at arm's-length, and give them an advocate; he indicates the dangers to be avoided, and the principal arguments to be employed. This preliminary portion, called *sermo*, is the actual lesson given by the instructor, and Quintilian insists on his attaching great importance to it.[2] Then the pupil's part begins. He

[1] Quintilian, ii. 4, 15.

[2] Quintilian, vii. 1, 14. In what is called the *Little Declamations of Quintilian*, which are not by him, we have very curious examples of the professor's *sermo*. See, notably, the 320th declamation.

composes his declamation, he writes it out, then reads it to his master, who corrects it phrase by phrase. This done, he learns it by heart and recites it with the intonations and gestures taught him. Then twice over he repeats it, once seated, once standing before his master and schoolfellows; Juvenal has some reason to say that this system, to which the class is submitted, is well adapted to give it a surfeit of eloquence.[1] But care is taken to let nothing of this be seen; that would show a lack of politeness, of tact, of what is called with slight exaggeration *humanitas*, not to admire an orator making his first appearance. Moreover, these young people are well aware that indulgence is reciprocal, and that he whom they applaud will repay what they have done for him when they declaim in their turn. And so, at the first slightly brilliant phrase which their schoolfellow utters, the young audience rises; they leave their seats, stamp on the floor, cheer—it is a regular delirium.[2] Let us imagine such scenes, taking place in excited and clamorous classes, sometimes numbering over two hundred pupils. The beginner retires, intoxicated with pride, and when, on his return home, he has received the congratulations of his enthusiastic family, he can believe himself a Cicero already.

All is not at an end; after the triumph of the pupil comes the triumph of the master. He has the desk, behind which he usually stands, removed, and, resuming the subject just treated by his students, he gives an amended version. This is a treat for the class to hear, and so keen a pleasure does it take that it wonders if it be not a crime to debar others from its enjoyment. Thus must have occurred the idea of opening the school door on the days when the rhetor was to speak, and letting all who wished to hear him enter.

They came in crowds. The society of the time, more enamoured

[1] It is, says Juvenal, to submit the professors and pupils to a diet of persistently repeated cabbage: *Occidit miseros crambe repetita magistros* (vii. 154).

[2] Quintilian, ii. 2, 9: *proni atque succincti ad omnem clausulam non exurgunt modo, sed etiam excurrunt et cum indecora exsultatione conclamant.* Verrius Flaccus, to excite still more emulation in his pupils, thought of making them compose simultaneously, and allotting them rare books as prizes. (Suet., *De gramm.* 17.)

than ever of letters, and somewhat detached from politics, found in these literary solemnities a relaxation it required. The most illustrious orators, Messalla, Pollio, the Emperor himself with his great ministers, Agrippa and Mæcenas, patronised them by their presence. The school was packed on a day when a famous master like Porcius Latro or Albucius Silus or Gallio was to hold forth. The ingenious reflections, the pointed phrases, the unexpected similes, the verbal sparkle, all the artificial flowers with which they decked out their discourses, were hailed with cries of enthusiasm. Nothing else was talked about next day in the fashionable and literary circles of Rome. Opinions were often very widely divided; there were jealous rivals who pitilessly turned to ridicule the expressions which the orator had used and which had been applauded the day before. Others, more audacious still, dared to re-fashion the theme treated, so as to prove they had more talent than he. The admirers, on the other hand, were inexhaustible in praise. They repeated the fine passages they had remembered, and which, on occasion, they used on their own account. However, despite the stir caused by these declamations when they had just been freshly heard, it was to be feared that nothing would survive of them in time to come. They must often have been impromptu. At other times orators, to use Latro's phrase, wrote them in their head, but none of them ever dreamt of publishing their orations. Thus all the rhetors, who were, after all, men of talent and in their time enjoyed high renown, seriously risked total oblivion; and in fact, some years after their death, we are told that nothing authentic of them has survived.[1]

If, however, we have preserved certain details about them and some fragments of their discourses, we owe it to a chance which it will not be unprofitable to relate.

[1] Seneca, *Controv.* i. pref. 2.

III

Seneca the father's book on declamations. What it contains. What is understood by *colores*.

Towards the close of the reign of Tiberius the family of the Annæi Senecæ held an important position in Roman society. It is known to have been Spanish by birth and sprang from Cordova. The father had come to Rome whilst still young, probably for the purpose of attending the lessons of orators of renown; he returned thither when he had children and wished to devote himself to their education and fortunes; towards the end of his life he appears to have settled there. He was a sensible, intellectual man, a great friend of letters, and passionately Roman, despite his provincial origin. None the less he was quite a son of the soil; the Spanish temperament, which we recognise in his son the philosopher, and still more in the author of the *Pharsalia*, his grandson, is manifested in him by bluntness, exaggerations, strong convictions, and violence. It is probable that he had a very warm affection for his friends, but it is certain that he had an active detestation for his foes. He treats those who do not share his views very ill; without mincing matters, he calls them fools and madmen, and decides 'that good sense is to be avenged by cudgel blows on their backs.'[1]

In his family he cannot have always been very easy-going. He insisted that his wife Helvia should live after the manner of the matrons of old, he confined her to the household cares, and would not allow her to acquire a literary and philosophical polish, like so many other society ladies. He was very fond of his three sons, to whom he had given a brilliant education, and who were all highly distinguished men. He was proud of them, and, like every one else, believed them destined for a great future, which did not prevent him from addressing them on occasion with some harshness. It is quite clear that between him and them there must have been a lack of sympathy. The sons wished to be men

[1] Seneca, *Controv.* v. pref. 10.

of their time. They did not wholeheartedly condemn the new fashions of speaking and writing; they did not keep their eyes obstinately riveted on the past, they had confidence in the future, they thought that humanity must needs perfect itself with age. Was not one of them the first of the ancient philosophers precisely to formulate the theory of progress? The old man, on the contrary, was morose and dejected; he proclaimed that all was going worse than in former days, and that 'it is a law, fatal and immutable, that human things which have attained their zenith relapse to the lowest depths with greater swiftness than they mounted.' It is permissible to suppose that, between people professing opinions so antagonistic, arguments must have been very frequent. To convince his sons the father launched out in eulogies of the past, and among the comparisons he drew with the present, he no doubt recalled that that epoch was the most brilliant epoch of Roman oratory; he spoke of those great rhetors, known only by name, he quoted the finest passages of their discourses which he had retained, and which no longer survived save in his head. Since he had heard them more than half a century had elapsed, but he had not forgotten them. In a time when memory had been brought to the pitch of an art taught in the schools, that of Seneca was of the nature of a miracle. 'He retained two thousand names, repeated them in the order in which they had been stated. He repeated more than two hundred verses which he had just heard, beginning with the last.' His children, who took great pleasure in listening to him, begged him to collect all these reminiscences, so as to prevent them from being lost. He did not require much entreaty, for, as he confesses with a good grace, 'it was not unpleasing to him to become young once more and return to school.' Thus was composed the interesting book, in which the rhetors of the first century live again for us.

It does not contain their whole discourses; Seneca's memory, marvellous as it might be, would probably not have sufficed to retain them in their entirety. He is content to quote from them phrases, passages, and sometimes complete demonstrations

which have impressed him. The title borne by the book in the manuscripts (*Oratorum et rhetorum sententiæ, divisiones, colores*) indicates what the author wished to do. He has been anxious in the first place to record the brilliant apophthegms (*sententiæ*), for which there was so decided a taste; they were then what was most applauded and least forgotten. The plan of the discourse (*divisio*) had also much importance; there was an effort to infuse in it as much ingenuity and craft as possible. Fénelon censures the preachers of his age with the same failing. The significance of the word *colores* is wider, and it is more difficult to define. Generally speaking, it denotes the manner in which the orator understands the cause he is to plead and the construction he puts upon it, his manner of presenting the incidents, the attitude he ascribes to his characters. A father complains that his son refuses to support him, and arraigns him before the courts; but is he to appear there exasperated, big with threats, armed with the law and demanding its rigorous enforcement? or mournful, bewailing, ashamed of being reduced to the extremity of dragging him to justice?—between these two *colours* a choice may be made. Sometimes the word has a still more definite meaning; it is applied to some incident invented to give more interest to the cause or make it easier to defend. A father, who is convinced that one of his sons intends to assassinate him, orders the other to put him to death. The latter hesitates and is content to throw his brother into a boat and abandon him to the billows. Later, when he is prosecuted by his father for the crime of disobedience, he relates, in his own defence, that, when he was dragging the unhappy wretch to the sea to throw him in, he happened to pass by his mother's tomb and believed he heard a voice issuing from it which forbade him to obey. Here we have quite a dramatic *colour*, leading to the grandest effects. It is not hard to understand the importance which *colours* acquired in the school; they were an element of novelty and originality which rejuvenated themes outworn. In them young imaginations gave the reins to their fancy, and they supplied the people of culture with a chance of securing

them immediate recognition and applause; a new and happy *colour* was a day's diversion for Rome.

Seneca's work contains ten books of *controversiæ*, that is to say civil causes, like those pleaded before the judges, and *suasoriæ*, the subjects of which were taken from history, and which resembled the French and Latin discourses which were given, and are still sometimes given, in our rhetoric classes.[1] A portion of the work is unfortunately lost, but what has been preserved suffices to give us an idea of the rest.

IV

The *controversies*. The reason for their success. The invention of subjects. Their monotony. The means employed to vary them.

It was the *controversy* which in the ancient schools most interested pupils and masters, and the reason is easy to divine. Antiquity always preferred judicial eloquence to other forms. Moreover, all those who pursued the courses of the rhetors were one day summoned to plead before the courts, whilst very few of them arrived at the Senate. It was natural, then, that they should more especially be drilled in what it was incumbent on them to do. The idea must have occurred from the first to approximate to reality by reproducing at the school such cases pleaded before the judges as had made a sensation and lent themselves to fine flights of eloquence; this in order to be less remote from reality.

At the time when Rome was entirely absorbed in Milo's trial, Brutus took it into his head to rewrite the speech which Cicero had just delivered for the defence, but which had not saved the accused; but he gave it a very different tone. Cicero had attempted to prove that Milo was not the aggressor; Brutus, on the contrary, admits without any evasion, that he lay in wait on the road for Clodius with the intention of killing him, and he congratulates him on having had the courage to rid the Republic

[1] Let us make a point of employing this word 'rhetoric class'; it is soon to be superseded in modern jargon by that of 'first class.'

of one of her deadliest enemies. The people whom he assembled that day to hear his controversy might have divined in the orator the future assassin of the tyrant. At the beginning of Nero's reign there befell a tragic incident related by Tacitus. A tribune of the people, Octavius Sagitta, was the lover of a married woman called Pontia. He had persuaded her to separate from her husband and made a promise to marry her; but, once free, Pontia shilly-shallied in the hope of a wealthier match, and ended by breaking her word. Octavius, driven to despair, remonstrated, threatened, protested his lost reputation, his exhausted fortune. Ever repulsed, he begs as a solace for a last night, the sweetness of which will restore him his empire over his senses. The night is fixed, Octavius comes to the meeting with a dagger under his toga. We know all that wrath and love inspire—quarrels, prayers, reproaches, reconciliations: pleasure also has in the darkness its privileged moments of indulgence. Of a sudden, seized with a fury unlooked for by Pontia, Octavius stabs her with his poniard. On Pontia's maid-servant flying to the spot he disposes of her with another blow, and rushes from the chamber.[1] Sagitta was not prosecuted forthwith; he was a magistrate and inviolate, but, on leaving office, the Senate condemned him to exile. One can well imagine how the affair was discussed at Rome, and how some took the side of the assassin, others that of his victim. Young Lucan, not yet twenty but already famous, who let no opportunity pass of attracting public attention, dealt in some *auditorium* with the subject which was agitating Rome and, to win supporters on both sides, he successively pleaded the *pro* and *con*.

But it was impossible for the school, in quest of subjects for declamation, to be content with reproducing actual law-suits. Great trials like those of Milo and Sagitta, dramatic trials which excite general curiosity, are not common. The usual thing before the courts is judicial discussions with regard to private and often paltry interests, cases of sale, of property, of inheritance, and so

[1] The whole affair can be read in Tacitus, *Ann.* xiii. 44.

forth. It could scarce be expected that young men's imaginations should be kindled by what were disdainfully called party-wall and roof-gutter suits. It was necessary to find them something different, and, since reality did not supply it, it had to be invented. Invention was facilitated by the liberties allowed the inventor; great care was taken to impose no constraint. A civil case always supposes a law which the court must apply; it is the very condition of the suit, and the fictitious suits imagined in the school can be no more exempted from it than the others; and so all the controversies in Seneca's collections are preceded by the provision of the law which is to serve as a theme for discussion. But, as a rule, this provision is not to be textually found, either in the Roman codes or in those of Greece. It is an imaginary legislation which is nearly everywhere invoked,[1] and, even when it is substantially correct, it is rarely that details are not added which distort it. It is thus in a world of romance that the declaimers set their puppets in motion. Are we in Greece? are we in Rome? at what period have the incidents occurred which we are about to discuss? It is hard to say. We notice that there is everywhere question of piracy cropping up, of piracy which since Pompey no longer exists in the Roman world. The tyrant also plays a great part, the tyrant of a petty city, such as was to be found in Greece at the epoch of Pisistratus, but whom the municipal system under which the Empire subsists has everywhere suppressed. He is represented as an abominable type of man, a monster who plunders, violates, tortures, slays, lives in his citadel surrounded by satellites, whilst in the shadow of his throne lurks tyrannicide in ambush for him, awaiting the chance to earn the famous reward, on which, at the school, there will be endless discussion, when the blow shall have fallen. One and other are such conventional figures, that the genuine tyrant, he who sits at

[1] M. Bornecque shows this very clearly in his notes. He informs us that he owes the particulars he gives us on this subject to M. Paul Frédéric Girard, professor of the faculty of Laws at Paris; he thanks him for it, and the public must thank him as well.

the Palatine, does not, as a rule, take to himself the abuse hurled at the tyrant of the school, and leaves 'the mob of students to butcher him in chorus in the classes,'[1] without showing any sign of caring a scrap about it.

It seems that under these conditions, the masters' imagination being at liberty to devise the subjects they wanted, and as they wanted them, they must have gone on incessantly producing new ones of varying character: nothing of the sort. Those they gave to the pupils were always the same. They for ever recurred to the same incidents, the same persons. This need not surprise us much if we recall how poor is the stuff on which the theatre has subsisted since it first came into existence, and how rarely it succeeds in renewing its youth save in externals and details. If it be true, as claimed, that it is the image of life, it necessarily follows that a life, which affords so few situations and characters, must be of a desolating uniformity; and, seeing that the declaimers, less enslaved to reality and abandoning themselves more freely to imagination, succeeded no better than the dramatic authors in diversifying the subjects that they treated, we may conclude that the human mind is no more fruitful and rich when it permits itself liberties of invention than when it is content to copy what it sees.

The method usually employed at the school to give a little freshness to old themes was to combine them. Recourse was had to one of them for incidents to introduce into that which it was desired to embellish. Sometimes characters were brought into it who had not figured in it originally, especially pirates or tyrants, the ordinary heroes of declamations. Often a few slight modifications were deemed sufficient, which, without changing the gist of the story, slightly renovated its appearance. This process is noticeable in one of the declamations which seems to have best succeeded with the pupils, that of the abducted maiden. A law is imagined which has never existed anywhere. It lays down that when a girl has been carried off, she has the right to choose

[1] *Quum perimit saevos classis numerosa tyrannos* (Juvenal, vii. 151).

between two satisfactions: either her ravisher shall be put to death, or she shall marry him dowerless. Nothing looks more simple, and it is not clear where a legal process can arise. However, it may happen that, if the girl decides for the marriage, her father may be unwilling to consent; he has a right to refuse, and then pleading is necessary. It may even happen, what is much more startling but not quite impossible, that it is the father of the culprit who refuses, and prefers to see his son dead rather than married; in this case there is no other resource than to charge him with insanity. But here is a more extraordinary hypothesis: let us suppose that in the same night the young man has run off with two girls, and that one demands his death, while the other consents to wed him. The situation grows very embarrassing, but it has the advantage of providing the orators with opportunities for strokes of wit and pungent sayings, which, we may well surmise, they did not fail to take. One of them imagines that, had the night lasted longer, the young man would have undoubtedly run off with a third. Immediately another puts in: 'I congratulate you, girls, that the dawn did not delay.' Somebody addresses the woman who has resigned herself to marriage, to make her change her mind: 'Consider now,' he says to her, 'whom you are going to marry; he is a man who is not content with one woman.'—'Even for one night,' interpolates another. It it is a regular *mêlée* of wit.

V

The censures passed upon the schools of declamation lost them no popularity. The prestige maintained by eloquence under the Empire, although its power was diminished. The teaching of eloquence remains the literary teaching *par excellence*.

This manner of complicating subjects by the addition of incongruous and far-fetched incidents, on the pretext of freshening up the interest, had the effect of rendering them more and more improbable. It followed that they deviated far from the causes which the young men would have to plead in the sequel, and that,

consequently, the school was no longer in a position directly to prepare them for the profession to which they destined themselves. This was the reproach most often brought against it, and the rhetors apparently proved by their example that it was deserved. When some circumstance led them to appear before a tribunal they ingloriously broke down. Porcius Latro, one day, when he had to address real judges, who sat in the open air, lost his head and had to be taken into a closed basilica in order to finish his pleading.[1] The adventure of Albucius Silus was still more ludicrous. He was pleading in his own country, at Milan, before the centumvirs, and, forgetting that he had no longer to do with indulgent hearers who would accept anything, he thought he could reduce his adversary to silence by employing one of those fine *colours* which excited cheers at the school. 'Are you willing,' he said, 'to end the debate at once by an oath? Very well then! swear! but I am going to dictate the formula to you: swear by the ashes of thy sire whom thou hast left unburied, swear by his memory ....' and he completed the tirade. 'Admirably done!' responds the advocate on the other side, 'my client is going to swear.' 'I did not tender an oath,' cries Albucius, 'I used a figure of speech.' Unfortunately the judges are in a hurry to have done, and the client to swear. 'But then,' says Albucius, 'this is the death of rhetorical figures.' 'So much the better,' retorts his opponent: 'we can very well get along without them.'[2]

It is very surprising that this just reproach brought against the schools of declamation of not directly preparing youth for what it had one day to do, did not prevent their attaining so high a success. I believe the reason is to be sought in political circumstances. Oratory could not retain under the Empire the position it had filled under the Republic. Tacitus observes somewhere that 'Augustus had pacified eloquence as he pacified everything else.' This expression is of a nature to disquiet us. It recalls another celebrated phrase, where an enemy to the Romans is made to say: 'When they have left nought else in a country,

[1] Seneca, *Controv.* ix. pref. 3. [2] *Ibid.* vii. pref. 7.

they boast of having made peace therein: *ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant.*' It would in fact have been a safe and sure method to prohibit every one from speaking. Augustus, however, did not put it in force. It cannot be claimed that the Empire was an absolute régime of silence. Oratory continued at the Senate, before the civil and criminal courts, in the public lecture-halls; it even seems as though the prestige of eloquence had suffered no impairment; for Quintilian it is ever the first of the arts, almost the sole art, and Aper's eulogy in the *Dialogue of the Orators* is more dithyrambic, more high-pitched than that of Cicero in the *De Oratore*. It is certain, however, that it no longer wielded the same power as in the past; it ceased to address the people directly, which constituted its strength under the Republic. There were no more popular assemblies, and the Emperor was the only man who, on certain solemn occasions, mounted the old tribune adorned with the beaks of the ships of Antium. At the Senate, where great affairs were decided, speech was not free; no one ever spoke his whole mind, and it was often compulsory to utter the contrary of what was thought. It thus became less necessary to train the young men in an art which had lost its consequence. And yet they were still practised in it. Never were the rhetors' schools more crowded nor their lessons better attended. The only thing was that declamation, at first but a means, tended more and more to become its own end; people had been accustomed to declaim in order to learn to speak, now they declaimed for the sake of declaiming. But, at the same time, it was recognised that, in itself and apart from the facility it imparted in speaking, declamation was no unprofitable exercise. It was intended to form orators, and it proved profitable to others. When we wish to convince some one and bring him over to our opinion, we have to know where to lay our finger on the ideas, to appreciate their value, to arrange them in the most logical order, to express them in the most persuasive manner; which not only constitutes the art of speaking but that of writing as well; and is the art of writing to be severed from that of thinking? This indeed was what was actually

taught in the schools, although there was an air of toiling only after eloquence, and it was probably for this reason that the word *eloquentia* took a more extended significance then and was applied to the whole of literature.[1]

The rhetors felt this indeed. Seneca said of eloquence, as it was taught in the schools, that is to say by declamation, that it leads to all things and furnishes arms even for those whom it does not train for its own ends, *instruit etiam quos non sibi exercet*:[2] and this is quite true. Practised in a broader, more intelligent manner, with a more unerring taste, declamation could in Seneca's phrase 'lead to all things'; it taught to write and think, as well as to speak. The fathers of families at that epoch did not ask so much. When they sent their sons to the school, they had but one motive: they asked the masters to make good speakers of them, and the masters, I do not doubt, thought of nothing but satisfying them. It was a little despite themselves, without their willing it, perhaps without their knowing it, that they allowed their exercises to assume a different nature from that of speech in the courts, and that they incurred the reproach of not solely preparing their pupils for what was to be their business. They were sensible of this reproach. They might, they ought perhaps, to have frankly accepted it; they might have retorted in their own defence that, if the education they gave were not strictly professional, there was, nevertheless, great profit to be derived from a general education which exercises the mind and renders it capable of anything; on the contrary, they kept their eyes fixed on the Forum and only wished to inspire what was done there: it was a fascination; so much the more so, that they were puffed up with pride, that it stung them to pass for schoolmasters, that they wanted to be orators alone. Albucius Silus, not to seem a pedant, is careful to slip vulgar expressions into his declamations.[3] Porcius Latro refuses to listen to the controversies of his pupils; he limits himself to declaiming in their presence, saying 'that he is not a professor but a model,' and so those who haunt him are called, not his *disciples*, but his

[1] See above, p. 47. [2] Seneca, *Controv.* ii. pref. 3. [3] *Ibid.* vii. pref. 4.

hearers.[1] I quite believe that many of the weaknesses which have given the rhetors so ill a repute are due to this; if, by their choice of subjects, they deviated far from those treated in the courts, they sought to approach the latter by their manner of treatment. It was the precautions they took, despite of all, to look like 'men of the Forum,' *forenses*,[2] which too often led them to reproduce in an exaggerated style the methods of contemporary advocates.

When, later, ten centuries onward, the Renaissance retraced its steps to the academic exercises of antiquity, and when in the classes were restored the discourses which replaced declamation, the conditions were changed; the school had no longer the same ties with the bar; there was no longer a question, as formerly, of merely turning out orators; a higher end was aimed at in the making of the child, and it seemed that to give him a right judgment, a mind adorned and fortified, a liberal soul, these old exercises, practised in another fashion and in a different spirit, might be of great service.[3] Instead of limiting their usefulness to a particular profession, as did antiquity, they were turned to account in the creation of that general education which precedes and prepares for its profitable reception. It is that which all the nations of the civilised world have adopted since the Renaissance, and, since we have seen that the very principle and source of this education was already to be found in the Roman schools, this has appeared a sufficient reason for studying them.

[1] Seneca, *Controv.* ix. 2 (25), 23.

[2] The phrase is Pollio's, with reference to Porcius Latro, and he adds that this excessive care is what shows well that he is in reality only a schoolmaster.

[3] One of the most distinguished intellects of our time, J. J. Weiss, published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (15th September 1873), an article entitled: 'Classical Education and Academic Exercises—The Discourse.' Although the article is thirty years old, it so perfectly applies to what is going on under our own eyes, that I cannot refrain from quoting the last lines:—'We prize, as much as we ought, all that is of the domain of intelligence and genius: natural and historical sciences, mathematical sciences, economics, statistics, philology, archæology, and the rest; but numbers and their abstractions, geometry and its deductions, the natural sciences and their classifications, history and its phenomena, are only parts of man and of the human understanding. The humanities and letters are man himself; to remove them from education, it would be necessary to commence by taking man from man.'

VI

Information on the society of the time afforded us by the *Controversies*. Family life. Marriage and divorce. Can we take it that this information is true? What inferences are to be drawn from the lofty sentiments occasionally expressed?

There are other reasons assuredly; we quickly perceive, for example, in reading Seneca's work, that it contains curious details of the society of that epoch, the age of Augustus; and, as they would be hard to find elsewhere, they ought not to be lost.

The subjects of the controversies were generally taken from private life. The trouble the masters took to give them greater interest or to freshen them when stale, and that the pupils took to enhance them by the *colours* they saw good to invent, had the final effect of giving them a highly romantic character, and this character was one of the reasons for the success they obtained. The romance is almost entirely absent from Latin literature, which does not imply that the romantic had no place in the imagination of the Romans, at least when they were young. They must have had a taste for it like every one else, and declamation pleased them because it afforded a means of gratifying it. The absence of the romance or novel is annoying for those who to-day wish to know the details of private life in the first century of our era, so much the more indeed since the drama also fails us for that epoch. We must fill up the gaps as we can, and have recourse to the declaimers for what they say, bearing in mind that they were people who readily exaggerated, and that their testimony must be used with caution.

In the picture they present us of family life, there is one person scarce to be seen, the young girl. It is true that in reality she did take a subordinate place. We have, nevertheless, in Seneca's collection a controversy turning entirely upon her, and it is interesting to note the part he makes her play. Here, in a few words, is the subject. A young man had been captured by pirates, and his father

took no trouble to ransom him. He was, then, doomed to remain a prisoner, had he not touched the heart of the daughter of the chief of the band (*archipirata*). After having made him promise to marry her when no longer a captive, she set him free and departed with him. On his return to his own country he married her. But, after the lapse of some time, his father, having found a wealthy heiress, who had lost her parents, and was consequently in enjoyment of her fortune, an *orba* as they said at Rome, he wished to force his son to repudiate the first in order to wed the other, and, as he declined, turned him out of house and home.[1] Who is in the right—father or son? This is the subject for debate. Only to mention what is new and striking in the cause, I neglect the flood of commonplaces uttered on both sides. She is the daughter of a pirate—what does it matter? was not Rome a gang of brigands at the start? and was not good King Servius the son of a slave-girl? If each fashioned his own fortune, one would always be born in a great lord's family. But she has no dowry: so much the better, he who has married her is more assured of not being her bondman; and, in this connection, all the stupid jokes of the old comic writers about *mulieres dotatæ* are trotted out. Commonplaces of this kind reappear in nearly all the declamations, and I pass them over. What is really interesting in the present case, what deserves to be noted, is that in a cause where love seems to fill so large a space, it is not brought into the argument, or, rather, that almost the only orator who refers to it finds it a pretext for not regarding the marriage as serious, since it was contracted, he says, in a fit of madness (*furore et morbo*), that is to say, by lovers. Those who take the young woman's part praise her especially for her sweet and compassionate soul: 'She cared for the captives, she intervened in their favour, she lightened their sufferings'; such were the only virtues befitting her. Her husband seems disposed to prohibit her from love as from a crime: 'When she beheld him

[1] With respect to the expression *pater filium abdicat*, used by Seneca, M. Bernecque tells us in his note: 'The *abdicatio*, constantly referred to by all the Latin declaimers, a deed by which the father expels his child, is dispensed from supporting him, and deprives him of his rights of inheritance, *never* existed at Rome.'

for the first time, clad in rags, his hands chained, his limbs emaciated, his eyes sunk in their sockets, he was not framed in a manner to inspire her with a passion; it was not then a case of love at first sight, it was pity alone which inspired her to save him.' It is clear that in permitting the belief that the girl was in love, he would have supposed that he was slandering her.[1]

I do not wish to leave this controversy, one of the most interesting in the collection, without pointing out that here again we have one of those attempts at outbidding in wit habitual with the declaimers, each of them seeking to surpass the previous speaker, and to dazzle the public by more and more amazing *colours*. One of those who attacks the young woman takes it into his head to say, that it is not true that she fled, as pretended, unknown to her father the *archipirata*, and that in the guise of betraying him she was really obeying him. Eligible matches are not common in a gang of brigands; the father must have found it a good chance for marrying her dowerless to a decent man. This *colour* was fairly happy; another speaker seizes on it and goes a step farther: who knows if the father did not cherish the design of making her a spy to keep the pirates informed of the good hauls they might attempt? Immediately a third, of more vivid imagination, has the idea of putting the hypothesis in action and making a drama of the romance. In the middle of his pleading he abruptly pulls up. He looks behind him; he feigns to hear a tumultuous din, to behold fields laid waste, farms in flames, people flying for their lives; and, turning to the affrighted young man, he says to him: 'Why be afraid? keep up your courage—it is only your father-in-law arriving!'

Marriage, which in real life brings about so many legal proceedings, is also naturally the subject of many declamations. In one of the most interesting the husband is afraid of being deceived. He has been long away on business, and, in his absence from home, a

[1] Scudéry took up the story of the pirate's daughter and inserted it in his romance of *Ibrahim ou l'illustre Pacha*. It would be interesting to see how he treated it, and to ascertain by comparison the difference in manners and ideas.

wealthy neighbour very much enamoured of his wife has essayed all means to seduce her. He has been unsuccessful, and filled with admiration for a virtue, which apparently seems to him rare, he bequeaths to her on dying his whole fortune, and justifies his liberality by saying that it is 'because he found her honest.'[1] This solemn testimony seems suspicious to the husband, and he charges his wife with infidelity, just because some one has attested she was faithful. There survives to us of this ingenious controversy a fairly long argument by Porcius Latro, one of the most agreeable pages of Latin literature; I have quoted it elsewhere.[2] Side by side with the jealous husband, a little too prompt to suspect, the declaimers present us with another who is only too fully assured of his misfortune. He is a brave soldier, who has lost both hands in the wars; his wife, who knows he will be unable to punish her, does not trouble to deceive him. The husband, having surprised her with her paramour, goes in search of his son, orders him to slay the guilty pair, and, when the son falters, turns him out of the house and disinherits him for his disobedience. But it was divorce which furnished the most abundant material to the schools of declamation. Nowadays we derive from it amusing comedies for the most part, the Romans took it on its tragic side. Is not this a proof that they suffered from it more than we? They nearly always suppose that the father has children by the first marriage, that the new wife (*noverca*) cannot suffer them, and that they detest her. With her war penetrates the house. Thenceforth between the hateful *noverca*, the father who supports her, and the son who attacks her, terrible dramas are enacted. They have all but one thought,—to get rid of one another; the son stabs, the *noverca* poisons, and the father dies, without any one knowing whether it be his son or his wife who has assassinated him.[3]

[1] Seneca, *Controv.* ii. 7 (15): *pudicam repperi.*

[2] *La Religion romaine d'Auguste aux Antonins* (ii. 226, fifth edition).

[3] I have no need to remark on the gravity of making young people of fifteen years of age live in such a world and amid all these crimes. Let us add that apart from all these crimes, there were what are now called at the bar 'dirty' cases. Such is the controversy bearing as its title *Sacerdos prostituta.* (Seneca, *Controv.* 1, 2).

Is this a faithful picture of the society of the time? It has been doubted, and assuredly the declaimers, with their habits of exaggeration and their natural taste for melodrama, were quite capable of blackening it, but they did not invent all; the facility of divorce had disintegrated the Roman family. Cicero's speech in defence of Cluentius shows us that the *noverca* of the rhetors was no fanciful creation of the rhetors, and that society observed no ceremony in getting rid by poison of an inconvenient relative. There was the case of a certain Oppianicus, who had already been four times married, when he wedded Sassia. She, in truth, was only at her third husband, but one of her husbands had been her own son-in-law whom she had ravished from her daughter. This Oppianicus, it was said, had murdered two of his children, one of his wives, his brother, his sister-in-law, who was with child at the time, and his mother-in-law. With regard to the last, Cicero tells us that, as Oppianicus kept his accounts regularly, the sum of 400 sesterces (about £3), which he paid for the poison that disencumbered him of his mother-in-law, was to be found duly entered in his books. He mentioned that he had bought it from a druggist of Ancona, who went from fair to fair, retailing his commodities. Under Augustus, although society had grown better behaved and the prince prided himself on being the reformer of public manners, poisoning charges appear no rarer than in the preceding epoch, and we note, by what survives of the speeches of Messalla and Pollio, that the causes pleaded at the Forum fairly often resembled those devised in the schools. If declamation outstripped reality, it must be fully recognised that reality supplied many pretexts for declamation.

Our surprise is great at finding from time to time, amid those horrors in which the rhetors revelled, generous maxims, appeals to justice, to pity, to universal brotherhood, at hearing them invoke what they call *religio*, which for them is respect for natural rights, and enjoining men 'to put forth their hand to raise up those who have fallen, to inter the abandoned corpse, to give alms to the beggar.' The position filled by such lofty sentiments amidst

scandalous tales affords them more relief, and this very contrast leads us to ascribe them more importance than is proper. Some writers of our own time have thus been tempted to regard the rhetors who express them as precursors proclaiming a new era. This is going very far. It must not be forgotten that these fine sayings, rightly to be admired in themselves, are here in reality only an advocate's arguments, *colours*, which the rhetor uses in the interest of his cause,[1] and that he is quite ready to say the opposite, if he pleads the contrary cause. The orator, when he speaks against a rich man, will cry out against wealth and make a show of regret for the days when Rome was poor and virtuous. Is he perfectly sincere? I question it somewhat when I hear him exclaim on another occasion: 'It is easier to applaud poverty than to endure it.'[2] Even so we cite the law and the code when they suit us; it is only when they are adverse that we glorify equity and invoke in high-sounding terms 'the unwritten laws.' We find an orator deriding the magicians and oracles: let us not be too ready to admire him as strong-minded and above the prejudices of his time; he is simply developing a school theme to reassure Alexander, whom a soothsayer would fain withhold from entering Babylon.[3] All these passages, closely examined and reinstated in the body of the discourse, instead of being isolated, seem less inspired by profound conviction than by the necessity of finding reasons for everything, and there is nothing in them to suggest the Christian preaching of the first few centuries, which has been imprudently mentioned in this connection.[4]

Twice there is mention in Seneca's collection of one of the greatest abominations of the time; it concerns that custom which permitted the father of a family, if one of his children seemed to him deformed, or if it simply displeased him that his family should increase, to lay it at his door to die of cold or hunger, unless some passer-by should carry it off to do with it what he would. I fail

[1] Seneca says so positively: *color religionis.* (Seneca, *Controv.* i. 16.)
[2] *Controv.* ii. 1 (3), 18.
[3] Seneca, *Suas.* 4.
[4] Havet, *Le Christianisme et ses Origines*, ii. 228.

to see where M. Denis has discovered that 'the declaimers vigorously unmasked the danger and immorality of this barbarous usage.'[1] Nowhere is it openly assailed. A father, who has exposed two twins, dares to speak of his tenderness to them; he justifies his action by saying that, being perplexed how to choose between them, it has seemed simpler for him to expose the two, and no one retorts to him that he had done better to keep them both. One alone of the rhetors permits himself censure: he finds him 'hard and cruel,' which is scarcely downright wicked; and yet Seneca seems to think that he goes too far, since he tells us, as though to explain his audacity, 'that he was of rather stern nature.'[2]

There is in one of these controversies, the subject of which is novel and curious, a saying which has struck me. It is supposed that the father of a family, to reward the devotion of a slave who has saved his daughter's honour, emancipates him and gives her to him as his wife. This conduct appears so extraordinary, that he is accused of being mad and indicted before the judges. You should hear the abuse with which all the declaimers overwhelm him! Marry his daughter to a slave! Were it not better she were dead? One alone, Albucius Silus, dares to maintain that 'it is not nature which makes slaves and freemen, and these are but names imposed by chance on those who bear them.' But Seneca, after recording this remark, hastens to tell us that Albucius on that day spoke as a philosopher: *philosophatus est*, which means, no doubt, a spinner of theories and hypotheses, and not a practical and sensible man. The society of the time also *philosophised* when it repeated the fine reflections that rouse our admiration. It was pleased to borrow them from the sages of Greece, who had uttered them for the first time; they were an ornament to conversation and a proof of a liberal education. But they remained superficial. The world, so willing to wear them as finery, was not penetrated by them. A more effective preaching was essential, a more

[1] Denis, *Théories et idées morales dans l'antiquité*, ii. 111.
[2] *Controv.* ix. 3 (26), 11.

profound revolution, for Greek wisdom to acquire that force which transfuses words into deeds. None the less it was not unprofitable that people were accustomed to hear its precepts, and, in repeating them, prepare for their comprehension and practice. 'Upon this site,' says Havet, 'was Christianity to build.' Let us go no further: Christianity found the site prepared, but it was Christianity which built the edifice.

VII

Influence of the schools of declamation on Roman literature. The schools of declamation in the provinces.

What is beyond all question and so familiar to every one, that there is no need to insist on it, is the influence of the schools of declamation on Roman letters. It extended over all so-called eloquence, that is to say, over the whole of literature. Hardly any writer escaped from it altogether, and they submitted to it from the first day. Ovid was one of the most brilliant pupils of the rhetors. Of him the memory is preserved of a controversy which must have been famous among the students of the time. It had to do with a husband and wife, who had mutually sworn not to survive each other. The husband, who wished to know if his wife would keep her promise, spread a report of his death; at once she threw herself out of a window. She did not die; but, when she was cured, as her father insisted that she should separate from this too inquisitive husband, she obstinately refused to leave him. Ovid defended the husband. He spoke much of love; it was a subject in which he had been engrossed all his life. He wished to show that the young man was only guilty of having loved too much. 'When we love too much, we are incapable of moderation, of restraint, of discretion. A love which knows how to order itself, which commits neither indiscretions nor follies, which keeps watch on its words and acts, is an old man's love, *senes sic amant.*' Thus, already at the school, he was

what he always was; Seneca remarks on it; he retained the habit to the end. It is not that, as a rule, he forces his voice, is rigid and strained, like Lucan for instance; on the contrary, he has grace and ease; but he loves romantic themes and readily gives them airs of melodrama. He infuses wit in emotion; his characters seem to plead their passion more than express it, they are babblers, chatterers, disputants, above all, great coiners of witty shafts and pointed sayings, among which some are to be found coming from Arellius Fuscus or Porcius Latro, for he lets nothing escape him. The writers who succeeded him, orators, historians, poets, all retained, like him, traces of their education. All or nearly all declaimed (here I take the word in its modern sense), but each in his own way, for there are many ways of declaiming. What they have in common, what is the very spirit of declamation, is the habit of writing as if they were speaking and had an audience; thence the abuse of oratorical forms, the taste for platitudes which give the style a factitious grandeur, the use of school expedients which risk smothering the personal accent and impairing the simple expression of the thought, the excess of regularity in development which suppresses fancy, the exaggerated pursuit of effect; finally, what is to-day called, a little unjustly, rhetoric.

Rhetoric was bound to succeed at Rome, it befitted a nation which loved pomp and majesty. It is more surprising that it spread so rapidly in the provinces, especially in those of the West which were half barbarian. With the inauguration of the Empire young provincials acquired the habit of coming to Rome for their education. They were very sensitive to the charms of the great city, and we must suppose that so soon as they had set foot there, they affected, as was the fashion, to appear more Roman than those who had never left it. The Gaul and the Spaniard, seeing the success to be obtained by rhetoric, passionately gave themselves up to it. In a civilisation he is only beginning to grasp, the foreigner at first seizes on the exaggerations; they are what strike him most, and what is easiest to copy. We are told that

the young men who haunted the schools retained more especially the brilliant apophthegms, the pointed phrases, and that they repeated them with intonations of voice which brought out their beauty, or, as was said then, they chanted them. Nor did they neglect to write them in their note-books, so as to keep them in mind and use them on occasion. Tacitus adds that, if they were not natives of Rome, they sent them to their own country for the delectation of their compatriots.[1] At the same time the rhetors began to move in society, like fashionable singers to-day, giving public recitals, which brought great honour and no small profit. It was thus that the taste for eloquence was propagated on every side, and that in all the great towns there were schools like those of Rome, which flourished exceedingly. During four centuries the whole youth of the Empire had its training therein; it ended by losing the use of its native tongue; it acquired habits, feelings, beliefs, and a new spirit, from which certainly is derived what of the Roman spirit has lingered in the world. Amongst ourselves, for instance, the impression has been so strong, that, despite events and years, it is in no degree effaced: we are still a Latin country, and if we desire full self-knowledge we must return to our origins.

This has often been said, and nothing is truer: it is no barren study that of a past, by which the present is explained; and when, for example, we attempt to discover, as I have been doing, what the Roman schools really were, we are not wasting our time in studying an extinct civilisation unrelated to us: in reality we are still absorbed in ourselves.

[1] Tacitus, *Dial. of the Orators*, 20.

THE ROMAN JOURNAL

THE ROMAN JOURNAL

WHEN we study the ancient societies we are delighted to recognise that on certain sides they resemble ours. This is what establishes a sort of sympathetic understanding between past centuries and our own; we are more closely attached to men like ourselves; we take more pleasure in their company, and we understand them better when we explain them by ourselves. But it is impossible for us not to observe how on many other sides we differ from them, and, though nothing may be more natural than these differences, we cannot refrain from surprise. Our surprise is especially great when it is a question of one of those usages, or institutions rather, which have entered so deeply into our life, that it does not seem to us as if we could get on without them. If it be shown to us that it was unknown to the ancients or that they only knew it imperfectly, we ask ourselves, unable to understand, how they managed to get on without it.

This is what we feel in the case of the press, for example. Who of us to-day could deny himself his newspaper? It has come to be a necessity almost as imperious as eating and drinking. It no longer suffices to receive it morning and evening; there are some at Paris which succeed each other from hour to hour, and there are people to be found who always buy that of the last moment, so as to be the better informed. Our curiosity has been excited by the very satisfactions it has had; it has grown insatiable. For our pleasure it must catch reports in their flight; we want to be told about everything and by every means. As scandal has become a habit, indiscretion has become a trade: we

insist on our newspaper serving us up daily some sensational piece of news, and when we fail to find the dainty, we pettishly shut it with the remark, 'Nothing in the paper to-day.'

And yet of this journalistic recreation, which we have made a necessity to us, it is certain that the ancients had scarce any idea. We do not know whether the Athenians ever knew anything like it. Among the Romans something still more surprising prevailed. They had newspapers, or at least what resembled our newspapers, and they were in a position to appreciate the services to be obtained from them; yet they did not divine the part they might assume, the place they would fill in politics, in literature, in the life of every one everywhere; they let them vegetate in obscurity for centuries, deriving from them hardly any profit. How shall we explain their failure to grasp what was to be one of the great forces—one of the tyrannies of our time, without appearing even to catch a glimpse of it?

We have here an historical problem of which we must seek the solution.

I

What took the place of newspapers among the Romans. The placard. The importance of inscriptions.

It is evident from the outset that if the ancients did not feel like ourselves the need of newspapers, it was because they had something else which took their place.

Among the means of publicity at their disposal there were none of which they made more use than placards; we use them still, but much less than they. When we traverse the ruins of a Roman town, we encounter them at every step. There are those made to last, and, with this intention, graven on brass, on marble, on stone. These are the enactments of authority, the laws of the Emperors, the decrees of the Senate and the decurions, or, even in private life, the contracts guaranteeing the right of possession, and the minutes of religious corporations desirous of recording the

regular performance of their sacred functions. For things of minor note people had not recourse to materials of such costliness. On a board, or simply on a wall whitened with chalk, they wrote in black or red what they wished to advertise: the letting of a suite of rooms 'at the Kalends of July or the Ides of August,' the announcement of a show 'which will take place, weather permitting or without fail,' and, more often still, an election address; the election decided and the candidate returned or rejected, a new coat is put over the tablet, and it will serve for the candidate of the following year; advertisements of this nature are very numerous at Pompeii.

The abundance of placards in the Roman towns is easily accounted for by the very conditions of ancient life. We know that the ancients never had much taste for home life, and spent most of their time in the Forum, enjoying the sights afforded by the public place. In these long promenades the placards naturally attracted their eyes; they stopped to read them, and it was one of the habitual occupations of their idle days. Things have altered very much in our modern societies; we are readier to stay at home, and we have much more to do there. Time and opportunity fail us for sauntering about the streets and surveying the walls; and so it has come about that, as we no longer go to find placards, the placards have come to find us.

This little revolution was accomplished by means of journalism. There was in Paris at the beginning of the seventeenth century a man of singularly active and audacious genius, replete with ideas, very much in advance of his time, who incessantly pondered over some new invention, the physician Théophraste Renaudot. On May 30, 1631, he had published the first in date of French periodicals, the *Gazette*, which scored a great success from the start. However, this success was far from satisfying him. The *Gazette* more especially addressed the curious and the politicians, and supplied them with official news of France and abroad. Renaudot wished to undertake a more serviceable than brilliant enterprise, by which every one would profit: in the middle of Paris he estab-

lished a bureau of addresses, a centre for information and publicity, where any one could procure particulars of what he needed. Some resorted there to announce what they had to sell, that it might be easy for others to find there what they wanted to purchase. But it was as yet only half an invention: it was only possible to get information at the bureau of addresses by putting oneself to trouble and wasting time. Renaudot, who wished to facilitate business, had the idea of circulating in Paris a sheet containing particulars of the goods offered for sale, in such a manner that any one could make his choice without leaving home. We only know of a single number,[1] which seems to indicate that it cannot have had a long existence. But the idea was a happy one, and some years later it was resuscitated. He who appropriated it was one Dugone, who has noticed, he tells us, how some people, especially foreigners,[2] take a great interest in reading bills, but how, at the same time, it is not a pastime that every one can indulge in. Carriage people, for instance, pass too rapidly and look from too great a distance, to see them properly; magistrates and ecclesiastics are constrained by their gown, which imposes on them a certain reserve; it would be scarce becoming to ladies to approach too close or mingle too freely with the crowd staring at them. And so it was that the idea occurred to Dugone of collecting them and making a journal of them, which he called by a name which has remained to it—the *Petites Affiches.*

Among the Romans the placard never grew into a newspaper, but it continued to be displayed on the walls until the end of the Empire, and never ceased to be their principal medium of publicity. It was by the placards, or, as was more often said, by the inscriptions, that authority made its decisions known; that citizens

[1] I borrow this detail and many others from the *Histoire de la Presse* of M. Hatin. He has reproduced this precious number, and among the objects on sale are to be remarked: 'A coat of scarlet cloth, unfinished, lined with satin of the same colour, and with silver stripes, would be sacrificed for 18 écus'; 'A house in the Pont-Neuf quarter, with seven bedrooms, for 1200 livres'; 'Beds with serge vallances, necklaces, earrings'; finally: 'A young dromedary at a reasonable price,' which is no everyday piece of goods.

[2] Molière calls the Germans 'great inspectors of bills.'

testified their piety to the gods, their devotion to their princes, their gratitude to their benefactors; that, finally, magistrates and private persons spread abroad in public all they wished to communicate to it. That is why the inscriptions were then so frequent, and explains how they survive to us in so great a number, though so many must have perished; the *Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum* already comprises more than two hundred thousand, and is not yet completed. Sainte-Beuve was quite right in saying: 'The true *Moniteur* of the Romans must be sought in the innumerable pages of marble and bronze on which they graved their laws and their victories.'

II

Literary publicity. Of what means the Roman writers availed themselves for the advertisement of their works. Readings during repasts. At the Forum. In the halls of the baths. In the grammar schools. Institution of public readings. The announcements of booksellers. How books were circulated in the provinces.

But placards cannot suffice for everything, and there are services which they can only render imperfectly. Only to cite one example, I ask myself how, without other aid, literary reputations could have been made and propagated at Rome and throughout the Empire. This is, it seems to us to-day, the special business of the press, and for more than two centuries it has taken upon itself this office. In 1665 a councillor of the Parliament of Paris, Denis de Sallo, founded the *Journal des Savants*, to inform people of an inquiring turn of mind, by extracts or analyses, of the important works appearing all over the world.[1] Then came the *Mercure*, which devoted its attention to works of a lighter order. It was the grandsire of our minor press, and it cannot be said to be of yesterday, since it has had, all things allowed, two hundred and thirty years of existence. During the whole of the eighteenth century the journals and newsletters never ceased to keep the public informed of the literary gossip of the day. It was by them

[1] It must be remarked that the *Journal des Savants*, as well as the *Gazette* and *Les Petites Affiches*, still exist.

that people learnt that a tragedy of Voltaire had just had a success, that some sentimental novel in the English fashion was being read by the best people, that some pungent pamphlet on philosophical or religious matters was in circulation, all of which gave them the idea of procuring them. The case is pretty nearly the same to-day, and when we see how a book signed by an unknown name has difficulty in making its way, despite advance paragraphs and advertisements, despite the 'boom' made about it by an indulgent journalism, and how hard it is to attract public attention, we fail to understand how the ancient authors could accomplish it, lacking all these resources.

They did accomplish it, however, and not only the great writers, who have everywhere special means for dispelling the general indifference, but sometimes the commonplace and even the bad; which proves that it was not so hard as we imagine for them to make themselves known. It is worth while inquiring how they succeeded in this.

Let us take the poets. Without going so far as to say with Malherbe that they are of no more use in a State than good skittle-players, it is certain they are a luxury with which, at a pinch, we can dispense. At Rome, where the idlers were so severely condemned, no distinction was made between those who did nothing and those who did nothings, and the poets were, without hesitation, placed in the latter category.[1] It was natural, then, that the public should be rather ill-disposed to them, and by no means eager to read their verses. None the less, verses are only written to be read. Nowadays they are printed, and if the public will not buy them, they are given to the public. This method is not always satisfactory, for he who receives a book is under no obligation to open it. In antiquity the author gave a reading of it, which was a surer way, the very people who were loth to listen being forced to hear. For a rich man the thing is easy: he has only to give a dinner party. Round a well-served

[1] Cato confounded them with the buffoons who earn a dinner by amusing the guests, and called them indifferently *spungers*.

board he unites friends whom he knows complacent by nature, clients who, under the circumstances, have to be so, and sometimes debtors who hope by some well-placed plaudits to deserve some leniency when their debts shall fall due. When, after a good repast, the host starts reading, enthusiasm overflows; 'there are cries of Good!—very good!—admirable!' The hearers turn pale with emotion; at need an indulgent tear steals from their eyes, they start in their seats and stamp on the floor. Next day the report of the triumph is noised through Rome, and behold the host's poems launched. But the poor man does not possess such resources. Unable to assemble hearers at his own home, he has to take them where he can find them. Sometimes he retails his poetry in the middle of the Forum; at the noise he makes loafers stroll up, when not too absorbed in the game of hop-scotch on the temple steps, and form a ring about him, as about the mountebanks and exhibitors of performing animals. Others reserve themselves for the public baths, where there are vaulted halls which make sonorous lines resound—

Suave locus resonat voci conclusus.

The necessity of finding somebody to listen to them makes them ferocious. Martial shows us them armed with their manuscript and in search of a hearer. When, by good fortune, they have met with one, they set their hearts upon him; they pursue him to the bath, to his dinner-table, even to his bed-chamber, where they will not let him rest in peace.[1]

It was a means of advertising their verses, but not of procuring esteem. We can understand that neither the guests of the opulent poet, when they leave his dining-room, nor the victims of the poor poet, when they have succeeded in escaping his clutches, make a point of carrying away with them a very warm admiration for what they have just been hearing despite themselves. But there were persons who enjoyed a certain credit with the public, recognised official critics of literary productions, licensed by letters

[1] Martial, iii. 44.

patent so to speak, whose favour it was sought to secure. These were the grammarians, those that is, who were entrusted, along with the rhetors, with the education of youth. They took children from the earliest age, taught them first to read, then to understand what they read, then to judge what they had understood. It was thus they became the arbiters of taste and celebrity. They did not invariably exercise their functions in an intelligent manner; their critical methods were somewhat rudimentary; sometimes they assigned places to the great writers as they did to their pupils, put Cæcilius before Plautus, or Plautus before Cæcilius; now they attempted to sum up their merits in an epithet, giving Pacuvius the surname of *Doctus*, to Attius that of *Altus*, just as we say Philip the Bold or Louis the Just. They none the less enjoyed high authority, and it was a very lucky chance for an author to have their approbation. About the reign of Augustus a sort of revolution took place in their profession. Up to that epoch the grammarians had only expounded the very ancient authors in their classes; Horace's master Orbilius went back as far as Livius Andronicus, the first in date of the Roman poets, and he had the pretention of making him admired by blows of the whip. A man of intellect and of enterprising spirit, Cæcilius Epirota, formerly the slave of Atticus, who had had him carefully brought up, opening a school, had the idea to attract custom by introducing the study of contemporary poets. This is what we have seen among ourselves, when Victor Hugo and Leconte de Lisle have figured in our scholastic programmes. The innovation was bound to succeed. It was for a writer a sort of consecration of his glory to be interpreted in the schools, and the grammarians more than ever became the dispensers of renown. They were courted, and, to use the expression of a poet of the time, their votes were canvassed as formerly that of the people at the Field of Mars.

About the same period, a very great man, Asinius Pollio, had the conception, we are told, of public readings. It is quite evident that it was not a question of those readings delivered to friends, of which I have spoken above; that is a custom which has existed

from all time, and which there was no need to invent. What Pollio did was to regulate them, to surround them with certain formalities, to make of them a kind of institution. Halls were erected expressly for the purpose, which resembled theatres; the number of the invited was increased, they were divided up into various categories; the important people were put in the orchestra, the others on the tiers of benches, and, up aloft, the *claqueurs*. They were actual spectacles, and it must be recognised that they had the advantage of procuring more speedy and more striking successes than those of to-day. A book circulated by printing seeks out isolated readers and only wins them one by one. In public readings they are all won at once, and, as they mutually excite each other by their very proximity, triumphs are more easily obtained. An historian, a philosopher, a poet, could thus achieve distinction at one swoop, like a dramatic author to-day after the production of a successful play. It was a powerful agency for publicity.

For his part, the bookseller, as we may suppose, neglected nothing to sell his wares to advantage. There were always booksellers at Rome, but at first their business appears to have been very unpretending. They had not the exclusive monopoly of the sale of books, and it so happened that they had the competition of the wealthy to meet. We know that Atticus, who possessed a great number of slave copyists, set them to work for the public, when they had transcribed the books he wished to keep to himself. He was in this way a kind of publisher for his friend Cicero, and not only did he have books copied and put in circulation, but he augmented their sale by skilful advertising. Cicero wrote to him on this matter: 'You have pushed my discourse on Ligarius so well, that I shall entrust this duty to you thenceforth for all my works.'[1]

From the beginning of the Empire the booksellers seem to have grown more important at Rome. There is talk of them; we know the names of some, we know their ways. They usually installed

[1] Cicero, *Ad Att.* xiii. 12.

themselves under the porticoes frequented by loungers, as in the eighteenth century did Barbin and his colleagues in the gallery of the Palace. Before the door the volumes were tastefully set out, cleaned with pumice stone, shining with a coat of cedar-wood oil, rolled round a black stick the ends of which were gilded, with parchment bands bearing the title of the book. 'I see it well,' said Horace to his book, which seemed to him in too great a hurry to appear, 'you wish to go and see the portico of Vertumnus or that of Janus: you have a hankering to display yourself coquettishly on the shop-front of the Sosia brothers.'[1] On the columns or pilasters which framed the shop the new publications were announced, probably with some appreciative encomiums. Sometimes even verses could be read there, the best no doubt of the work offered to the public, which were intended to give a favourable opinion of the rest. Martial asserts that one has only to take a stroll to make a rapid perusal of the poets of the day.

These are some of the means used by the ancient writers, in the absence of the press, to make themselves known to the public, and it is certain that at Rome these means were quite sufficient. But how did they go about it when it was a question of diffusing their name and their books through the rest of the Empire? It is in this, more especially, that newspapers would have been useful. They serve to-day to set reputations travelling to distant countries; thanks to them, literary news penetrates everywhere and is hailed with the more eagerness the further it comes. At Paris we are content to skim the newspaper; in the provinces it is learnt by heart; there nothing escapes the reader's curiosity: he wishes to know the name of the play that is being applauded, and of the book that everybody is talking about, and it is thus that literature is propagated from the centre to the extremities. The Romans, using other means, obtained practically the same results as we do. In the conquered countries the upper class, in contact with the distinguished persons whom Rome sent them, imperial legates, commanding officers of the legions, revenue inspectors, had very

[1] *Epist.* i. 20.

quickly acquired a taste for Latin letters; schools were everywhere established, and, with them, a passion for rhetoric which it is hard for us to understand. The young provincials who had studied at Rome had, as we have seen, been careful to collect the fine sayings they heard in the mouths of orators and advocates of renown, and sent them to their own country, where, no doubt, they roused universal admiration. They must also have entertained their relatives and friends with the new works just out, and inspired them by the praise they bestowed with the desire of making their acquaintance. But how could these be obtained in the provinces? In the simplest fashion in the world: the Roman booksellers must have had their agents there, with whom they stocked the works of which they wished to dispose, as is done to-day. Cicero writes to Atticus, his publisher: 'Take care that my work shall be at Athens and the other Greek cities,'[1] that is to say, plant it with the booksellers of the country where those interested can come and buy it. To indicate that a book has had a success, Horace says that 'it brings money to the Sosia brothers and that it crosses the seas,'[2] which signifies that it sells in the provinces on the reputation which the Romans have given it. If, on the contrary, the sale is not very remunerative at Rome, the bookseller, desirous of getting his money back, and counting on the Africans' and Spaniards' taste not being so hard to please as the Romans', carefully packs the copies and exports them to Utica or Ilerda.[3] In the provinces, then, were sold the good and bad books which appeared in the capital. There were booksellers there, which caused some surprise to the younger Pliny, who doubtless believed, like many wits, that the world came to an end at the bounds of the Pomœrium. But his surprise quickly turned to satisfaction when he was informed that they stocked his works, and that the provincials read and admired them much. 'I begin to believe,' he said, 'that my books are not far from being perfect, since, in countries so diverse, the taste of people who resemble each other

[1] *Ad Att.* ii. 1. [2] *Ars Poet.* 345.
[3] Horace, *Ep.* I. xx. 13.

so little, agrees in esteeming them.'[1] It is evident that his reputation had not taken long to penetrate even into Gaul. That of Martial had gone farther still, since he tells us that 'Britain sings my verses.' It was because people fancied themselves, when reading them, in the full whirl of the gay life of Rome, and because this was as keen a pleasure for a Briton or a Gaul of the period, as it was for a German or Russian noble at the close of the eighteenth century to hear tell of the *salons* of Paris.

III

Political news. How it reached Rome from abroad. The newsmongers. How it reached the provinces from Rome. Newsletters. *Tabellarii*. The imperial post. The State makes it a monopoly.

It is, above all, for the communication of political news that the newspaper does duty to-day, and it seems to us that it would be hard to replace it in this order of service. The Romans, who were a free people, were much absorbed in their affairs. The disputations of the public place, the trials before the courts, the announcements of candidatures, the discussion of laws in the popular assemblies, kindled every one's passions. External events had not less interest for them; not only did they wish to know what was befalling their legions, which were fighting in Spain, in Africa and in Greece; but it seemed to them profitable to be informed of the internal condition of suspected or hostile countries: to know, for example, who prevailed in Macedonia, Demetrius or Perseus; in Numidia, Jugurtha or Hiempsal. To maintain successfully the wars which they had undertaken, or prepare for those which threatened them, it was essential that they should keep their eyes open upon the whole world, and know what was going on there.

It is certain that they did know this, and that events of any importance came fairly speedily to the public knowledge, even without the telegraph and the newspaper. The historians tell us that on several occasions the results of certain battles, impatiently

[1] Pliny, *Ep.* ix. 11.

awaited, reached Rome before they were brought thither by the official messengers: that was because tidings travel by ways that are undiscoverable; they mysteriously circulate from one person to another, and speech, which 'has wings,' according to old Homer's phrase, bears them through vast distances, without its being possible to say precisely whence they have come and whither they have passed. To account for this obscure and rapid propagation the ancients had imagined a goddess of a hundred eyes, a hundred ears and a hundred mouths, Rumour (*Fama*), of whom Virgil has drawn the picture: 'In the day she posts herself on the summits of the highest buildings to see all; in the night she perambulates the firmament to relate all; she never takes repose, as assiduous in spreading the false as in distributing the true.' It is easy to see that this allegory had a somewhat profound depth of reality.

These reports which Rumour sows in the air are not lost; they are picked up in their flight by the people who, amplifying them, propagate them; these are the newsmongers. There are scarce any newsmongers to-day; the telegraph and the telephone have competed with them too severely; it is a profession that is passing away. But it flourished among us in the seventeenth century, and even after the invention of newspapers. Renaudot's *Gazette* appeared but once a week; the newsmongers had seven days start of it, and they profited thereby. We are told that they took their stand in the public gardens, at the Luxembourg or the Tuileries, or under the elms of the terrace bordering the Seine. Those of the Palais-Royal had the reputation of telling so many lies that the tree under which they gathered had acquired the name of the 'Tree of Cracovia.'[1] They formed a corporation not without importance; for some of them it was a trade they exercised in town during the day and from which they derived an income. In an account-book of the Duc de Mazarin has been

[1] The Tree of Cracovia was felled at the end of the eighteenth century, when the Duke of Orléans had the side galleries of the Palais-Royal constructed. It was an event, and it was sung by the poets. In Grimm's *Correspondence* are to be found some verses inspired by its disappearance.

found the following entry: 'To the Sieur Portail, for the news he has supplied weekly: five months at ten livres per month—fifty livres.'

In a city like Rome, which, according to Tacitus, was inquisitive and garrulous,—*in civitate sermonum avida et nihil reticente*—newsmongers cannot have been lacking. There were some who gathered at the Forum, in close proximity to the tribune, which had given them the name of *Subrostrani*. Thence proceeded the most sinister reports: there were announced the deaths of persons in remarkably robust health, and the defeat of armies which had never fought. Newsmongers in general are folk of a gloomy cast whom nothing pleases, alarmists who paint things at their blackest. Those of Rome were always finding that affairs were mismanaged, that the generals did not know their business, and they ventured on proposing plans of campaign to them. Livy makes Æmilius Paulus say at the moment of his departure for Macedonia: 'There are people who, in the gatherings of the Forum (*in circulis*), want to teach us where we must encamp, the places we must master, by what road we should invade the enemy's country, how we are to provision ourselves, when it will be most profitable to go into action, when it will be preferable to avoid it; and, not only do they advise what it is necessary to do, but when one does not do what they have counselled, they are seriously annoyed.'[1] And, to satisfy their curiosity, this witty man proposes to take them with him; he offers to pay their passage, to provide them with a horse, and to put them in the front rank that they may have the pleasure of as close a view of the battle as possible. Under the Empire the grumblers did not escape at so cheap a rate and with only some banter. The Forum was policed by soldiers disguised as citizens, who passed through the groups, inciting the people to speak, and giving the example by attacking the Emperor and his government. When thus they had loosened tongues they took the names of the babblers and went off to denounce them to the authorities: it was the beginning of *agents provocateurs*.

[1] Livy, xliv. 22.

We may well presume that the notable people of Rome did not commit themselves in these open-air groups, and that they refrained from going to talk politics at the foot of the tribune; they spoke of them at home, above all during the repasts which were then the occasion or pretext of all society gatherings. There were people only asked out to dinner because they were supposed to be well-informed. They are described to us, going from house to house, and telling what they know or can invent on the subject of the Parthians or the Germans, the eternal terror of the Empire; they are ignorant of nothing, they tell you the exact number of men who are in arms on the banks of the Rhine or Danube; then, continuing their tour of the world, they deal with the state of the harvests in Egypt and Africa, a matter of much moment to the Romans, who thence derived their subsistence.[1] It was not only the men who prided themselves on having good information; Juvenal has drawn the picture of the woman newsmonger, who would be, he tells us, the most insupportable of all were there not the bluestocking.[2] It may be conjectured that in these gatherings it was not only a question of foreign affairs, and that there must have been much chatter, or rather scandal, of what was known of the Palatine: and so they were still more strictly supervised than the Forum conventicles. There was no difficulty in knowing what was said at them; there was no need of introducing professional spies; there were volunteers, the best of all, since they could not be suspected. As the informers were sure of the prince's favour and inherited a portion of the property of those whose condemnation they secured, people were never lacking who went and repeated the remarks they had heard, and accused imprudent talkers before the Emperor or the Senate. And yet, although it was so dangerous to speak, people could not keep silence. Nothing could cure that frivolous society from its mania for levelling barbs of sarcasm at the master, and from repeating the malicious rumours current upon him and his. Never were there so many false reports flying about as at this moment, when

[1] Martial, ix. 35. [2] Juvenal, vi. 400.

so much trouble was being taken to prevent their diffusion. The very precautions taken against them gave them more importance. How must they not have seemed serious and plausible, when people were seen risking their lives to repeat them? And so the works of Tacitus swarm with them, and we have noticed that, even when he deems them futile and unworthy of all confidence, he cannot refrain from reproducing them.

In such wise were the residents at Rome kept informed more or less accurately of political news. How did those who happened to be in the provinces learn it? Scarce could they do so save by the letters of their friends; thus correspondence between Rome and the various parts of the Empire was very active. Thence a whole literature, of which, unfortunately, there survives but little; but the letters of the great personalities of the time which have been preserved for us among those of Cicero, and which do not suffer by their proximity, show how much wit and good sense the writers lavished upon them, what a grasp they displayed of the political comedy, what experience of men, what practice of life. The letters had not all the same destination: they were sometimes addressed to one individual, sometimes to several. These latter letters were occasionally posted up (*in publico propositæ*), so that all the world might know them; sometimes several copies were transcribed and sent to different people of importance; it often happened thus at critical moments, when there was need of being well-informed, that a letter containing some interesting piece of news was communicated by the addressee to people of his acquaintance, passed from hand to hand, and ended by becoming public property. It was this which no doubt happened to the majority of those which Cicero received or sent on the approach of the civil war. To my mind it can be said of letters of this nature, that they almost fulfilled, for a restricted circle, the function of newspapers to-day.[1]

[1] There was also a time in France, before the creation of newspapers, when letters took their place. When Charles VIII. had left for the war in Italy, many people, especially in Paris, were discontented and uneasy; evil reports were current on the position of the army. To respond to them, the government had the idea of having

Those witty people were scarcely at a loss how to write charming letters; the difficulty commenced when they wished to send them. They could only employ costly or uncertain means. In the great houses there were slaves whose office consisted in carrying their master's letters: they were called *tabellarii*. They sometimes made very long journeys. Cicero sent one express from Cilicia to Rome to deliver the Senate a report of his military exploits, and demand that he should be awarded the title of *Imperator*; but this was an expense which could not be often repeated. As a rule the *tabellarii* carried the letters for short distances; in the case of a long journey other means had to be used. Then recourse was had to what, among ourselves, when the post was dear, were called *occasions*. Cicero often entrusted his to the messengers of the publicans. These great financial associations, which levied the taxes in the provinces, were forced to have frequent communication with Rome, where the directors of the companies resided; they kept up therefore a certain number of messengers who were constantly on the roads. As Cicero was the friend of these associations, and their usual advocate, they were happy to oblige him. When this resource failed him, he had to resort to less assured means; he wrote to his freedman Tiron, whom he had left ill at Patras, and of whom he wished to have news, to send somebody to the harbour every day to find people setting out for Rome and entrust them with letters for him. Unfortunately the persons who seemed most willing to take the charge upon them were not always punctual in their delivery; they delayed to hand them over, and sometimes even lost or kept them. How many letters, impatiently awaited and bringing important tidings, have never arrived at their destination!

It was necessary to preserve the official despatches at least from

printed 'extracts from letters sent from the army of the Neapolitan war.' It is natural that these broadsides, printed in black-letter and sold in the streets, should have in great part been destroyed. Several specimens have been preserved, however, either at the Bibliothèque Nationale, or at that of Nantes, which have been published by M. de la Pilorgerie. Some also are to be found in the admirable library of M. le Duc d'Aumale at Chantilly, and M. Picot has mentioned them and sometimes transcribed them in his catalogue.

this fate. In a well-governed State the communications between the master and his servants must be swift and sure. What would become of the Empire, if the prince could not reach the provincial governors and the army commanders with his orders at need? This was what led Augustus to create the post.[1] The institution was perfected by his successors; under the later Cæsars it worked with admirable regularity. All along the great military roads post-houses (*stationes*) were established, and every here and there rest-houses (*mansiones*), where food and lodging could be obtained. The post-houses contained horses and mules, one quarter of which a remount service renewed yearly, two- and four-wheeled vehicles, all built on the same pattern, and a staff of postilions, wheelwrights, veterinary surgeons, and employees of every kind, whose duties are laid down in the Theodosian Code. In addition to those light chariots which in a few days conveyed the traveller to the most distant countries, heavier waggons had been constructed to transport the taxes paid in kind by the provinces, and to carry provisions to the armies. All this organisation was very skilfully contrived, and there is no doubt that the Empire derived very substantial advantages therefrom.

But it was of no use to private persons. The government had entirely reserved it for its own use, and allowed very few persons to avail themselves of it. The Emperor entrusted some great functionaries with a certain number of these authorisations, which were called *diplomata*, and gave the right to post, but they were only to be used in the service of the State. Pliny, when governor of Bithynia, apologised very humbly for having had recourse to them in favour of his wife, who had just learned of the death of her grandfather and had to return to Rome without delay. It was, then, very difficult for private persons, to whom posting was

[1] There were several elements of this institution under the Republic. The cities were bound to lodge Roman functionaries proceeding to their post and furnish them with carriages and horses. This obligation was the point of departure and principle of Augustus's creation. It was towns situated on the post route which had to meet the expenses of horses and carriages. In this way the post cost the State nothing, but, for the municipalities, it became one of those heavy taxes to which they succumbed.

forbidden, and even for officials, who could only employ it under certain conditions, to be exactly informed of political intelligence. They could only learn it from often badly informed correspondents who had the greatest trouble to make their letters reach them. And yet the majority of these people, when they were far from Rome, felt the keenest desire and even need to know what was passing there. We are going to see that this need, which went unsatisfied, was one of the reasons which, towards the close of the Republic, brought about the birth of the journals.

IV

Cæsar orders the publication of the reports of the Senate and the people to be published. Under what form they are communicated to the public. Their transmission to the provinces, combined with the news of the day. How this mixture ends by introducing itself into the official publication compiled at Rome. The birth of *Acta diurna populi romani*. What they contain. The official part. The semi-official part. Miscellaneous news.

The journal was no sudden creation at Rome; there did not happen to be a man there, like Théophraste Renaudot among ourselves, who understood its utility in advance, and, without hesitation, without having to grope his way, gave it to the public in practically its final form. It was born almost by chance from a reform which had been undertaken with quite another intention. The story is worth the telling.

In the year of Rome 695 (59 B.C.), Cæsar was named consul. He attained to power with a strongly settled intention to do as much harm to the aristocratic party as possible, and, under pretext of serving the democracy, to prepare for the Empire. 'One of his first acts,' says Suetonius, 'was to decree that the reports of the sittings of the Senate, as well as those of the people, should be daily written out and published': *Instituit ut tam senatus quam populi diurna conficrent et publicarentur*. The assemblies of the people took place in the Forum, any one could be present, and it was perhaps because nothing of a secret nature passed there, that hitherto no

need had been felt of making and publishing reports. On the other hand, the Curia was rigorously shut to the public; the Senate let nothing of its transactions transpire, save what it really wanted to make known. This secrecy was one of its strong points. Political assemblies do not gain from too close inspection; it is hard to retain much respect, even for the most honoured, when we see to what intrigues they are given over, and what conflicts of interests and passions are concealed under the semblance of regard for the public welfare. Cæsar considered that the Senate would be the less esteemed the better it was known: he wished to tear off the mystery which put a kind of halo about it; that was why he decided that thenceforth 'they should write down and publish' reports of all the sittings. By these two words what did he mean to imply? The sense of the first affords no room for dispute: a young senator was chosen, usually an ex-quæstor, who took the title of secretary to the Senate (*ab actis senatus*), and it was easy for him to do his work with the notes of the shorthand writers. When the report was drawn up it was published. What was understood by this? Was it merely that it was put at the disposal of the public, and that those who asked were allowed to consult it? The word *publicare* has, I believe, another significance. In the legal language of the Romans, an act had become public when it had been posted up in a position where it could be clearly read from below, *unde de plano recte legi possit.* It was evidently in this manner that Cæsar had the reports of the Senate published. There was, moreover, in this procedure a precedent which it is well to recall. It can be understood how Rome, engaged in her great undertakings, must have experienced the need of making their results known to the people. When they were fortunate, there was naturally great haste in announcing them, but they were not hidden either when they were adverse. Livy relates in a thrilling fashion how the defeat of Thrasimene was learnt at Rome. Suspense reigned in the city; already those precursory rumours of a crushing disaster, of which I have just spoken, were beginning to spread; instinctively the whole multitude flocked to the Forum.

When it was gathered together there, the prætor mounted the tribune and only spoke these words: 'Citizens, we have been vanquished in a great battle,' *pugna magna victi sumus.* When it was a case of engagements of less importance, they had to be made known more simply, and this was how they had thought to do it. On the wall of the *Regia*, where the *Pontifex Maximus* resided, was placed each year a carefully whitened board, which was called *album*; at the head of it were inscribed the names of the consuls and magistrates; then, whenever some event occurred in Rome or the provinces, it was noted in a few words. It was a means of keeping the citizens informed of their affairs. The peasants who formed part of the tribes of the Campagna, the most numerous and the worthiest of all, only coming into Rome once a week, and hearing of nothing the rest of the time, had more need of being informed than others. Each market-day, we are told, they rise very early; they make a perfunctory toilet (Varro asserts they only shave once a week), don the toga and set out. I picture them to myself arriving in the city like their descendants, the *contadini* of to-day, who are to be seen congregating near the Velabrum, clad in their holiday attire. Probably the first call made by the ancient peasants was to the white tablet of the *Pontifex Maximus.* Many of them had children in the army, all were keenly interested in their country's affairs: it pleased them to learn that all went well with the legions, that the besieged town had been taken, and that the hostile army was in flight. Then, with free and joyous spirit, they went to hear the fiery orators of the tribunes, or to vote at the Field of Mars for the magistrates who were friends of the people. The High Pontiff's tablet remained in its place all through the year. It was removed at the end of December and stored in the archives. Later it was deemed that all these boards, which bore so many memories of the past, might possess great interest. They were brought together and published under the title of *Annales maximi*: it was the commencement of Roman history.

There is little doubt that the Senate reports were communicated

to the public in the same manner as the Great Annals. We do not know where they were stuck up, but it must have been in the Forum and at some much frequented spot. The crowd must often have flocked to read them, especially at times of popular excitement. People came thither to see what had passed in assemblies at which they had not been present, and to get an idea of speeches they had not heard. This was why they were used.

But what, above all, made their fortune was that, from the first, they were put to a use of which Cæsar had assuredly never dreamed. We have just noticed that it was very hard to keep in touch with all that was going on at Rome, when one was at a distance. The friends on whom one had counted for information, unsettled by unforeseen engagements, wrote less regularly than they had promised; the slaves and freedmen did not always know the proper means to be well informed. It accordingly grew customary to apply to one of the people who made a business of collecting news to transmit to those who wanted to know it. These were the ancestors of the *reporters* of to-day; but then, as the profession was not over-esteemed, they were simply called workmen (*operarii*). The name of Chrestos borne by one permits the supposition that they were Greeks, that is to say, those pliant, dexterous, and intelligent people who insinuated themselves everywhere, and were ready to do aught rather than die of hunger. In prowling the streets, in listening to what was said at the Forum, they picked up certain stories, which they strung together and made into a farrago to which serious persons sometimes gave a derogatory name (*compilatio*), but which did not fail to give the Roman lost in some corner of Germany or Africa a moment's diversion.

What these poor workmen knew least was the political life of Rome. They did not understand politics, and the company they kept could hardly instruct them. In this state of ignorance we can see what a great resource the reports of the sittings of the Senate, posted up at the Forum, must have been to them; they copied them out without changing aught, they had no more to add

than what their daily perambulations had taught them, and their 'compilation' or, as we should say to-day, their chronicle, was made. Cælius, in sending to Cicero what he calls *Commentarius rerum urbanarum*, says to him: 'You will find in it the opinions which each of the politicians has expressed.' This was evidently taken from the official reports. He adds, and this time it is a question of pieces of news borrowed from some 'compilation' of Chrestos: 'As for the rest, take what may interest you, and pass by a host of items, such as hissed actors, funerals, and other futilities of that sort. In short, the useful facts outweigh them.'

But here is a still more unlooked-for innovation. We have just noticed that Cælius was somewhat ashamed of sending these handy gazettes, in which frivolous anecdotes were combined with serious intelligence, to his friend Cicero. Apparently, however, this amalgam was to the taste of many, for at a very early date we find it introduced even in the Forum placards, where the reports of the meetings of Senate and people were published. It was quite a perversion of Cæsar's idea to join with these political documents, which he had alone wished to bring to the knowledge of the people, what Cælius unceremoniously treated as ineptitudes (*ineptiæ*), and what we call to-day miscellaneous news (*faits divers*). Serious men must have been scandalised to read within the space of a few lines the speeches of tribunes and the account of some funeral or wedding; and yet, thanks to circumstances, these petty items soon became more important than the rest. Since the Empire there had been hardly any more assemblies of the people; as to those of the Senate, Augustus, who took pleasure in undoing what Cæsar had done, forbade anew the publication of its reports. Even supposing that this law were not enforced to the letter, it is probable that nothing more than a scrappy summary was given. Thence it was natural that the essential part of the *Acta senatus et populi*, that which at first had been their reason for existence, coming to be diminished more and more, the news of Rome, or, if you will, the miscellaneous news, little by little assumed the upper

hand, and that what was accessory ended by becoming the principal feature. This was what could not fail to come to pass.

We can conceive, I think, a fairly precise idea of the contents of these placards, daily renewed, which the curious came to read and copy at the Forum. There was first an official section, that is to say, what it was deemed politic to disclose of the reports of the Senate, the decrees of the magistrates, the letters and speeches of the Emperors, mention being made of the interruptions and applause with which they had been received;[1] then a section which we might call semi-official, and which was not less interesting. It comprised, with news of the court, the *communiqués* of the imperial authority. Cæsar had it put there that he had refused the title of king offered him. The important ceremonies were described; every day were set down the names of the persons whom the Emperor had received at the Palatine. We know that Livia, and, later, Agrippina assumed the same privilege, and had note taken there of the visits paid them also, which much offended Tiberius and Nero. As to the part reserved for miscellaneous news, it must have been remarkably well filled, judging by the number of odd tales it supplied to the Latin authors. The elder Pliny especially, so fond of the queer and prodigious, owes it much: it is thence he has taken the story of a shower of bricks which descended on the Forum, whilst Milo was haranguing the multitude; he also borrows that of the faithful dog which could not be torn from the corpse of its master, who had been murdered and thrown into the Tiber, and that again of an enthusiastic admirer of a charioteer of the red faction, who, unwilling to survive him, cast himself on the pyre where his remains were burning, an

[1] We know from Pliny that the acclamations of the Senate were mentioned in the reports from Trajan onward. Mommsen thinks that the mention of interruptions was still more ancient. In the oration of the Emperor Claudius, which has been discovered on bronze tablets at Lyons, and which was evidently taken from the *Roman Journal*, these words may be read: 'It is high time, Claudius, to tell the Senate how far you want to go.' It is usually supposed that Claudius at this challenges himself, which seems very strange. Mommsen's opinion is that the interruption of a disrespectful senator has been interpolated. Claudius, we know, was accorded little reverence, and no constraint was shown in calling him an imbecile in his own presence.

example of devotion and passion which filled the other factions with envy. It is from the same source also that he relates how, under the eighth consulate of Augustus, an inhabitant of Fæsulæ came to sacrifice at the Capitol with his eight children, his twenty-eight grandsons, his eight granddaughters, and his nineteen great-grandchildren; it is probable that this anecdote was inserted by order of the Emperor, who was uneasy about the depopulation of Italy, and loved to do homage to large families. Let us add that we also find notices of important marriages, births, and deaths, not to speak of divorces, which must have taken up considerable room, since Seneca tells us there was at least one a day at Rome—*nulla sine divortio Acta sunt.* Finally, this same Seneca gives us to understand that some vainglorious persons used placards on occasion to advertise themselves, when he says: 'For my part I do not insert my liberalities in the gazette,' *beneficium in Acta non mitto.*

Under this form, and with the developments they had received, the ancient *Acta senatus et populi*, which Cæsar had created, became indiscernible. And so, apparently, the need was experienced of modifying the name they bore. They are usually called *Acta diurna populi romani.* This title we have a right to translate by that of the Roman Journal.[1]

V

Success of the Roman Journal until the end of the Empire. Why it never acquired the developments and the importance of the press of our own days.

The success of the Roman Journal was not for a moment doubtful. From the first day we see it in everybody's hands; all the great persons retained by their functions in the provinces have it forwarded to them. 'I know,' says Cicero to all his

[1] So much the more, as the word *journal* is derived from the adjective *diurnalis*, which itself comes from *diurnus.* The most complete collection of what remains to us of the Roman Journal is to be found in M. Hübner's monograph entitled *De senatus populique romani actis.*—Leipzig, 1860.

friends, 'that you receive the Journal,—*Acta tibi mitti certo scio—Acta omnia ad te arbitror perscribi.*—You must know all that goes on by the letters of those who are deputed to copy the Journal for you.' And he himself does not neglect this means of information, when a destiny he deplores exiles him for a year in the government of Cilicia. 'I have the Journal up to the Nones of March,' he writes to Atticus, 'I see that, thanks to Curio, they are not bothering themselves about the provinces, and that I shall be able to leave mine in a short time.' A century and a half later, the younger Pliny, who is on his estates, writes to one of his friends who has remained at Rome: 'Keep to your good habit of having the Journal copied and sent to me while I am in the country.' Later still, under Theodosius, Symmachus fills his letters with commonplace compliments, and wears himself out, to use his own expression, in gracefully bidding his friends good day. But, not to leave them quite in the dark as to public affairs, he joins with these generalities a summary of the political and other news, which he calls *Breviarium* or *Indiculus*. This summary, compiled under his direction by one of his secretaries, was no doubt abstracted from the Roman Journal.

Thus, through the whole duration of the Roman Empire from beginning to end, the Journal lived on; but it always lived in the same manner. No fertile innovation seems to have been made in it, and thus to live is to vegetate. It was of service for transmitting news, it was for that it had been employed from the first; but nothing more was made of it, and no one had a suspicion of the importance it might acquire. There was very little gratitude even for the profit derived from it, and those who would have found it very hard to dispense with it affected to speak of it only in terms of the greatest contempt.

Many reasons can be assigned to explain why the press did not then assume the same development and importance as to-day; and yet it seems to me that, looking into them closely, none of them is quite decisive. The most serious of all, undoubtedly, is that between the Romans and ourselves there was this difference, that

the Journal comes to find us, while among the Romans it was necessary to go and find the Journal. It was stuck up in a place where every one could read it; in reality it was only read by chance, when the reader happened to have leisure and to pass the wall on which it was inscribed. It was possible to send and have it copied, but that was a bother, and one only resigned oneself to it when there was nothing else for it, that is to say, when one was absent from Rome and wished to know what was going on there. So long as one resided in the city, attended the meetings of the Senate, moved in talkative circles, in which the news was repeated or fabricated, one felt dispensed from seeking it elsewhere. Thus the use made of the Journals was but intermittent; it would have had to be regular to grow into a habit, and as it never became a habit, it was never a necessity.

All this is very true; but it was not impossible, it was even very natural, that one day some one or other might have had the idea of modifying the conditions under which the Journal was produced. For that it would have sufficed for one of the 'workmen,' whom the great lords employed to gather news for their absent friends, to have succeeded in persuading them of the interest they would have in finding on their doormat every morning that sheet which they only received from time to time, and to be regularly informed at home and without any trouble, instead of going to seek such information at the Forum. Thenceforth all would have been changed, and the 'compilation' of Chrestos might have become a newspaper like ours.

But here is another difficulty, and one of the gravest kind: the Journal completed, it had to be circulated, which was not easy with the means then available. Printing did not exist, without which one does not conceive of the dissemination of a newspaper being possible. No doubt antiquity was ignorant of printing; but it must also be confessed that it was within an ace of learning it: every day iron stamps, hollowed out or in relief, were being used to print on thousands of vases, lamps, and tiles the name of the maker the place where made, and mention of the consuls in office,

which gave the date of production. It may therefore be said that antiquity was on the brink of a great discovery, and that an experiment or a chance might one moment or other have precipitated it. Is it very rash to imagine that the one step more, the single one that remained, might have been taken had the Journal assumed its legitimate importance, and the necessity of circulating it excited the spirit of invention? In any case, printing, whatever may be said, was not absolutely indispensable to the success of the Journal: there remained the manuscript copy; slave copyists were numerous at Rome; they wrote rapidly, they were cheap, and, strictly speaking, their work might suffice. When Cicero felt the need of rousing public opinion in his favour in the affair of Catiline, he found a large enough number of copyists to transcribe and distribute in a short time, through all Italy and in the provinces, the depositions of the witnesses against the conspirators.[1] Pliny reports that the old informer, Regulus, having lost his son, sent a thousand copies of the eulogy which he had spoken on him, to be solemnly read on the public place of the principal cities of the Empire.[2] A thousand copies—that is very little, if we dream of the thousands of subscribers to be served to-day; it sufficed then to create the publicity of the Journal which had just come into existence; time would have done the rest.

As to the difficulty in securing the Journal's delivery at its address, it was apparently the most inconvenient of all, and yet it is that which could have most easily been solved. The post, existed. True, as we have seen, the Emperor reserved it for his own use; but can it be believed that if the imperial authority had understood the services that the press might have afforded him in directing opinion, he would have hesitated to facilitate means for the Roman Journal regularly reaching all the provinces? Nothing would have cost him less, or rather, nothing would have brought him more. It is hard to comprehend how people so practical as

[1] *Pro Sylla*, 34: *describi ab omnibus statim librariis imperavi, divisi toti Italiae, emisi in omnes provincias.*

[2] Pliny, *Epist.* iv. 7.

the Romans, of whom the elder Pliny says that there are none more bent on all that can be useful, *omnium utilitatum rapacissimi*, did not decide on making the whole world profit by the imperial post. Restricted to the prince's service, it was one of the great expenses of the Empire, and in time became one of the causes of her ruin; put at the disposal of private persons, it might have been an abundant source of revenue. For the utility of this reform to be grasped, only an occasion was needed, and the Journal could have provided it. As it had an official origin and character, it seems as though the Emperor ought to have had less objection to allow the post to carry it as an exception, and that, with time, the exception would have become the rule. In another way, here also, it might have been possible, at need, to dispense with the post. We know that there was much travelling in the Roman Empire, and that, on the whole, it was speedy travelling.[1] Around the post-houses where the Emperor's horses and carriages gathered there were not wanting horses and carriages on hire, willingly put at the disposal of private persons; it would not have been impossible to have organised with them an independent service, had it really been wanted.

It is certain, then, that no one of the obstacles which the press had to encounter at Rome was in itself unsurmountable, but it is also certain that no effort was made to surmount it. This is the manifest truth of the small interest taken in it. Among the reasons which must have prejudiced the Romans of the period against the journals, one of the gravest perhaps was that they were very badly written. People who, Seneca tells us, suffered from literary intemperance, must have been very sensitive to this defect. The Roman Journal, we must not forget, evolved from a report; it ever retained the dryness and monotony of that. Petronius in his satirical romance supposes that Trimalchio takes it into his head, in the middle of the bizarre dinner he offers his guests, to have his book of accounts read aloud. This book, which contains

[1] I refer to the information given by M. Friedländer on the Romans' manner of travel in the first volume of his *Mœurs romaines d'Auguste aux Antonins*.

particulars of all that has passed in the wealthy freedman's immense domains, is compiled, we are expressly told, in the style of the Journal of the city (*tamquam urbis Acta*), and this is what we read therein: 'The seventh day after the Kalends of Sextilis in the territory of Cumæ, the property of Trimalchio, there were born thirty boys and forty girls. Five hundred thousand bushels of wheat were taken from the barns to the granaries, and five hundred bulls tamed. On the same day the slave Mithridates was crucified for blaspheming the tutelary genius of our master; on the same day a conflagration in the gardens of Pompeii; the fire began in the farmhouse.' And the reader continues with the same accumulated jumble of news, with nothing outstanding in this dry enumeration to arrest attention. One can understand how this kind of literature, which appears to delight Trimalchio, was not adapted to please the fastidious lettered men who composed the society of the time.

Let us add that the Roman Journal was a sort of *Moniteur* of the Empire, and it is hardly of the nature of official sheets to be very agreeable. This particular one must have been very closely supervised. We are told that Tiberius himself appointed the secretary who was to be entrusted with the editorship of the Senate reports, and we may be sure that he only chose a man in whom he had perfect confidence. There is no doubt that the greatest care was taken to let nothing slip into the Journal from which public malignity could profit, and yet, if we are to believe Tacitus, it did not always answer. He records that the foes of Thrasea, who incriminated all his actions and wished by all means to make him pass as a rebel, said to Nero: 'The journals are read with more avidity than ever in the provinces and the armies, to know what Thrasea has last abstained from doing': *diurna populi romani, per provincias, per exercitus curatius leguntur, ut noscatur quid Thrasea non fecerit.*[1]

Thrasea was a sage, and, in spite of all, a moderate; he spoke very seldom at the Senate, he carefully refrained from attacking

[1] *Ann.* xvi. 22:

any one to his face who was esteemed by the Emperor, or from openly contradicting a proposition which he was known to favour. But, on the day it was set down for discussion, he stayed at home. He did not join the crowd of those who went to compliment the prince every time he committed a crime; he scrupulously shunned being present at the sitting of the Senate when Nero was congratulated on the death of his mother, or Poppæa decreed divine honours. It sufficed, then, in forming a judgment on a decree of the Senate to ascertain whether Thrasea's name appeared among those who voted, and that was why, in the provinces and the armies, where it was more difficult to learn the truth than at Rome, so much interest was taken in finding out his abstentions. But it was a real master-stroke, one which could not be often repeated, to make the official journal itself an instrument of opposition. As a rule it was more inoffensive. Whilst by the insipidity of its flatteries it irritated the upper class, always prone to speak ill of the imperial authorities, the complacency with which it retailed the petty occurrences of the city prejudiced serious minds against it. Already Cicero had referred to it rather slightingly. Tacitus is severer still in an important passage of his *Annals*, where he shows what he thinks of it, and the part to which he degrades it. 'Nero's second consulate offers nothing remarkable to the historian, unless he be pleased to fill volumes with describing the foundations and timber-work of the amphitheatre which the prince had constructed in the Field of Mars. But the dignity of the Roman people exacts that we only recall in its history the events of signal importance, and leave such impertinent details to the journals.'[1] Here is an allotment of functions, of which the press, to-day so proud and tyrannical, would have no cause to boast.

Thus the Romans, whilst availing themselves of the journals, felt at bottom small esteem for them. They found them useful for circulating official documents and communicating news, but they did not think their province capable of further extension.

[1] *Ann.* xiii. 31.

Since they did not appreciate the importance of the instrument that they had to their hand, it was natural that they were not tempted to perfect it and render it capable of the marvellous effects which it has produced in our own days. And so it made no progress in five centuries, and was still, under Theodosius, what it had been under Augustus. To conclude then: it may be affirmed that if the Romans had journals, they had no experience of journalism.

Was this a good or was it an evil? are they to be pitied or congratulated? The answer to this question depends on the judgment to be passed upon the press, and we are aware that there is no subject on which opinions are more widely divided. What *can* be said, what merits remark, is that the Romans had no need of it to accomplish the great things they wrought; it would have no doubt assisted them to obtain some of the results they achieved, but they obtained them without it. With ourselves, for example, it has been one of the principal agents of national unity; it is the press which has, since the seventeenth century, accustomed France to keep her eyes fixed on Paris, which has imposed upon France the ideas, tastes, and fashions of Paris, which has little by little broken down the barriers hemming in each province, to establsh everywhere the same ways of speaking and living. But by other means Rome reached this state of things as fully and as swiftly as we. The whole western world from the Atlantic Ocean to the Balkans, from the Rhine to the Atlas, habitually modelled itself on her: nations different in origin and nature among themselves agreed to receive her laws, to adopt her customs, and to speak her tongue and in the end they so completely appropriated them that, even to-day, after so many catastrophes, what they find most permanent in themselves is that old Roman foundation which conquest laid there. It is said—and it is quite right to say so—that the press is what most aids the diffusion of ideas, and we are inclined to think that without it they would not find it possible to spread. And yet the press did not exist when the greatest of revolutions in our memory was consummated. Christianity

propagated itself without newspapers, almost without books, by the spoken word; and in less than two centuries it extended to the most distant lands, and in those lands it penetrated to the deepest strata.

Let us draw the conclusion that the advancement of humanity is not so entirely bound up with particular conditions, that it cannot be effected without them. What is right always ends by coming to pass. Whatever admiration we feel for the marvellous discoveries which have transformed our existence, let us not forget that, strictly speaking, they can be dispensed with, that men lived for long without them, and that, without them, they often arrived at the same results to which they lead us to-day. By diverse roads the world advances towards the goal assigned to it, and nothing prevents its attainment. In one way or another, sometimes a little more slowly, sometimes a little faster, it always accomplishes its destinies: *fata viam inveniunt.*

THE POET MARTIAL

THE POET MARTIAL

MARTIAL is very little known among us, and it must be confessed that this is very much his own fault. As we are seldom in the habit of reading the ancient authors after leaving college, we only know the names of those of whom we were told when we attended our classes. Now, Martial is not one of the authors readily employed to interest pupils; his works, so witty and so graceful, contain unpleasant indecencies, and we dare not tell young people anything of the pretty things to be found in them, for fear of inspiring them with a desire to read the rest.

These indecencies have in him a peculiarly disagreeable character: they are not the outbursts of a nature carried away by its passions and unable to hold itself in. Like Ovid, Martial was a man of very temperate nature and had much self-command. He thinks he justifies himself by saying that 'if his poems be not invariably decent, his life has been irreproachable': to me it seems, on the contrary, that this excuse recoils upon himself. We should be less irritated by him did we feel him transported by some storm of the senses which he could not withstand, and we are almost disappointed by the decency of his life, which proves that he wrote all his filth in cold blood.

It is clear that in accumulating it thus in his works he wished to gratify the public whose good graces he sought, and it was, in fact, one of the causes of his success. He had a perfect knowledge of the society in which he moved, and he served it according to its tastes. If in his time he found some persons to censure him, we see by the manner in which he retorts on them that their number

cannot have been very great, and that the reproaches addressed to him did not seem to him very formidable. To exculpate himself with the noble widow of Lucan, he is content to seek in her husband's works for a licentious epigram, which appears to him to justify his own.[1] Elsewhere he quotes verses, more than light, by Augustus,[2] which date from the period when the prince had not yet undertaken the reform of public manners, and paid small attention to his own. These authorities suffice him; not only does he make no apology for putting things bluntly and calling a spade a spade, but he almost glories in it: it is a quality which he terms Roman simplicity, *Romana simplicitas*, precisely as we justify improprieties of speech that may escape us by calling them *gauloiseries*. For the rest, these palliations do not seem to him very essential, and he is well aware that what in his verses may shock some tender consciences, is precisely that which will please the majority.

We shall, then, in the reading of Martial, form a very bad opinion of him and his time, if we do not look into our own hearts, and so temper our severity. Amongst us there has flourished, and still flourishes, a gross literature which is warmly welcomed by one section of the public. Are we to suppose that all the people who devour the novels printed in thousands of copies, and attend the plays that run for hundreds of nights, live in their own homes like the characters whose adventures are presented in them? They are very often good middle-class folk, only debauched in imagination, guilty, above all, of morbid curiosity, and well-pleased with a momentary glimpse of what they have no desire to imitate. As for the authors, they are probably less vicious by nature than in a hurry to attract public attention, and convinced that the shortest cut to success is to hatch a little scandal. I suppose it must have been the same in antiquity, and I conclude therefrom that it is not wise to deduce from Martial's poems any too severe inferences about himself or his time.

In any case, and whatever strictures we may pass upon his morality and that of his contemporaries, it seems to me we can

[1] x. 64. [2] xi. 20.

derive much profit and interest from his study. His life does not merely acquaint us with him alone, it illumines that of others; it shows us what was the position of the poets of the Empire, and, by the light it casts on the conditions of their existence, it assists us to explain the character of their works. This is what I am going to attempt to do.

I

The birth of Martial. Roman Spain. The education of Martial. The Spanish writers.

We do not exactly know the date of Martial's birth. It must have been about the year 40 of our era,[1] that is to say while Caligula was ruling the Empire. He was not Roman, nor even Italian by origin, but Spanish, and this merits remark at the outset.

The conquest of Spain had cost the Romans nearly two centuries; it was the land they took longest to subjugate. But if the resistance had been protracted, the submission, once accepted, was complete. Hatreds were quickly appeased; there no longer lingered on a memory of the former conflicts. The Spaniards very soon adopted the opinions, the customs, and even the tongue of their conquerors. That, indeed, was what happened almost everywhere. The ease with which the whole western world became Roman sometimes causes us a little surprise; it has been adequately accounted for by recalling that the Roman yoke was not galling, that it bestowed on the vanquished benefits they had never enjoyed before, comfort and peace; that, finally, national feeling had never amongst them been deeply rooted; they formed little tribes, cherishing internecine hatreds, which rarely united to face

[1] To be precise, let us say that Friedländer, in his excellent edition of Martial, puts his birth between the years 38 and 41. I have greatly profited by Friedländer's labours on Martial, Juvenal, and Petronius, as well as by his *Histoire des mœurs romaines d'Auguste aux Antonins*. (French translation, 4 vols., published by Reinwald.) He is to-day the best-informed scholar for the literature of the early Empire, and our chief authority on it.

the common foe. These cities, as the Romans called them, lived in isolation from each other, and hardly adhered to more than their communal liberties, to which Rome always adapted herself very well.

There is no doubt that in Spain, as elsewhere, the conquest of the upper classes was effected by the school;[1] and, as the staff of the Roman school was almost entirely composed of grammarians and rhetors, it was grammar and rhetoric that conquered barbarism for civilisation. We can hardly recognise in them such an efficacy to-day. Nothing is truer, however; when, on the confines of the world as then known, some savage country decided to enter the concert of civilised nations, the first sign it gave was to open a school and to summon a rhetor to it:

De conducendo loquitur jam rhetore Thule.[2]

The Spaniards had given themselves over to these studies with enthusiasm, they felt that they were made for them; and so from pupils they soon came to be masters. At the epoch of Augustus, Porcius Latro, a Spaniard, held first place among the Roman rhetors, and it was for a Spaniard, Quintilian, that Vespasian founded the first public chair of eloquence.

Martial belonged to hither Spain, like Quintilian. Bilbilis, his birthplace, of which no vestige remains to-day, must have been quite a little place, though it produced at the same time as Martial two eminent men, Maternus and Licinianus, who were able to attain a very honourable position at Rome. Was it at Bilbilis that Martial pursued his studies, or at some more important town in the vicinity—at Taracco (Tarragona), the capital of the province, for example? We do not know, but they must have been very brilliant. Later, in his hours of discouragement and dejection, after his hopes had so often played him false, he regretted that so

[1] This is what I have attempted to show with reference to the manner in which Africa became Romanised. In Spain the importance of the School had already been foreseen by Sertorius, and Plutarch tells with what ability he employed education to accustom the Spaniards to live on good terms with the Romans.

[2] Juvenal, xv. 112.

much care had been taken to give him such a good education. 'My parents,' he said, 'were great fools to make me learn literature. What on earth have I to do with grammar and rhetoric?'[1] And when a father asked him one day what masters he should give his son, 'Above all,' he replied, 'shun the grammarians and the rhetors. Take care that he never open a book of Virgil or Cicero. If, by ill-luck, he write verses—cut him off with a shilling. If he wish to acquire the arts that bring in money, let him learn to be a player of the cithara or the flute. If his mind seem to you rather slow and lumpish, make him a public crier or an architect.'[2] But it was only later that discouragement fell upon him and that Martial abused those fine studies upon which he had relied, and which led him nowhere. Let us rest assured that they charmed him in his youth, that he was very proud of his masters' praise and the applause of his schoolmates. He retained a very tender remembrance of his early years. His little native place was always very dear to him, and, even in those elegant circles where it was the fashion to smile at the barbarism of the provinces, he took pleasure in speaking of it and giving it celebration. 'Let those,' he says, 'who first saw the light in the cities of Greece delight in singing Thebes and Mycene, and illustrious Rhodes, and Lacedæmon with her contests of graceful youths! I myself am a son of the Celts and the Iberians, and, albeit my country's names be harsh to speak, I take no shame to repeat them in grateful verse!'[3]

At heart he remained a Spaniard; apparently he was also so in appearance and countenance. He tells us that he had a bushy beard, bristling hair, a deep voice, and that he could be recognised at sight as a man born near the Tagus.[4] What astonishes us is that nothing in the characteristics of his talent recalls the country to which he was so attached. As a rule the Spanish writers resemble each other: they have qualities and defects by which they are recognised; and what appears to prove that they take after their race is that they already had them in antiquity. On the first occasion of there being mention of the poets of Spain (it

[1] ix. 73. [2] v. 56. [3] iv. 55. [4] x. 65.

occurs in a discourse of Cicero's), we are told that they are heavy and bombastic: *pingue sonantes.*[1] The first Spanish prose-writer known was that Porcius Latro, to whom we have just referred, a fiery orator, violent, unequal, a creature of impulse. In the tragedies of Seneca there are descriptions of tortures and refinements of cruelty to make even Ribéra envious. Lucan in his worse moments falls into hyperbole and over-emphasis. In Martial nothing is found resembling this; he never distends his throat, he never strains after effect. He is one of the simplest and most natural of the writers who survive to us from the whole body of Latin literature. No Spaniard has been less a Spaniard than he in his poems.

II

Martial at Rome. With what intentions had he gone thither? His early life at Rome.

In 64 Martial, then nearly twenty-four years of age, left his country to go to Rome. It was not a mere journey of curiosity; he did not set out for but a few weeks' stay, like that Spaniard who, about the close of the Augustan epoch, made the passage solely to see Livy, and returned when once he had feasted his eyes upon him.[2] Martial had the idea of settling there, and, in point of fact, he remained there for four-and-thirty years without returning home.

What motive could he have had in leaving Bilbilis? He has nowhere told us, but I do not think it hard to divine. He was not rich, and the probability is that he had been educated above his station; he must, then, have found himself in the situation of so many among ourselves: in order to live, he had to turn to account the education he had received. It is not easy to do that in towns of small note, but the greater cities offer more chances, and this is why we are so eager to huddle together in them.

[1] Cicero, *Pro Archia*, 20.

[2] Pliny, ii. 3.

Rome then exercised upon the world a potent fascination. 'Behold this multitude,' said Seneca, 'to which the habitations of a vast city scarce suffice. It is nearly all composed of people not born at Rome. From their country towns, from their colonies, from the whole world, they flow hither as a river; some are spurred on by ambition, others come to fulfil public functions; debauchees seek here a convenient place in which all vices may be indulged with impunity; some wish to satisfy their taste for letters and the arts, others their craving for spectacular shows. People flock hither in the wake of their friends, to display their talents on a wider stage; there are those who come here to sell their beauty, others their eloquence; in short the whole human race gathers together here in a city where virtues and vices are paid at a higher rate than anywhere else.'[1]

Here we have many reasons to bring provincials to Rome. The Spaniards, who were very numerous among those immigrants, apparently came more especially 'to sell their eloquence.' We have seen that with them the schools of rhetoric had acquired great importance; there the young men engaged in brilliant studies, and were taught to speak well upon all subjects. Their provincial successes turned their heads; they hoped to triumph in Rome also, and thence perhaps rise to the highest offices of the State. So long as the Republic lasted there were not, properly speaking, advocates; the great lords were bound to defend their clients' causes, but they had to do it gratuitously; the law *Cincia* prohibited their acceptance of any fee. Under the Empire the law was, if not abolished, at least mitigated: a fee could be received on condition that it did not exceed 10,000 sesterces (£8). With this fee the profession began its existence; thenceforth there were advocates and a great number of them. Some of obscure birth, hailing from very small country towns, succeeded in achieving very brilliant positions at Rome. At their doors of a morning important people could be seen, who had come to solicit them to plead for them in some case; they awaited their rising, cheek by

[1] Seneca, *Cons. ad Helviam*, 6.

jowl with humbler clients, and, with the latter, accompanied them to the Forum. As may well be supposed, the law limiting their emoluments being honoured more in the breach than the observance, advocates of renown ended by growing very opulent. Tacitus estimates the fortunes of Vibius Crispus and Eprius Marcellus at two or three hundred millions of sesterces (£1,600,000 and £2,400,000).[1] What a temptation for young provincials, who discovered they had some gift of the gab, and how they must have gazed towards a city, where orators harvested so much glory and wealth!

However, it was not in the direction of oratory that Martial had turned, although he may have sometimes been advised to do so. He wrote verses and understood the doing of nothing else. As he was conscious of his own worth, he quite counted on easily finding employment for his gift in so great a city, full of generous patrons of arts and letters. He was much mistaken, and later he recognised that no more at Rome than elsewhere was it easy for men of merit to make their fortune. He might have been told on the day he left Bilbilis what, later, enlightened by experience, he said to a provincial who wished to follow his example: 'Tell me, Sextus, where did you find this fine conceit of yourself? What do you hope to do at Rome?—I shall plead, you tell me, and far better than Cicero—in the Three Forums I shall not have my like.—You have known Atestinus and Civis: they pleaded well, both of them, and neither of the two could make enough to pay his rent.'—'Ah, well, if eloquence brings in nothing, I shall write poetry. I shall come and read it to you; you will fancy it is Virgil you are listening to.'—'Poor idiot that you are! All those

[1] It is Tacitus who, in the *Dialogue of the Orators*, gives us particulars of the wealth of advocates, and Martial says the same. To turn one of his friends from poetry and persuade him to eloquence, he exclaims: 'What can you look for from Phœbus? There is money only in Minerva's strong-box. At the Forum you hear the chink of crown pieces; it may rarely happen that kisses resound about the poet's seat at times.'—(i. 76). It is true that in his 7th Satire Juvenal commiserates the poverty of advocates. From these contradictions I take it we can conclude that it was then as it is to-day: there were advocates who made money, and other who made none.

poor devils that you see shivering in their threadbare coats—they are your Ovids and your Virgils!'—'Then I shall make my way among the great.'—'Among the great? Barely three or four pick up a living at that game, the rest starve to death.'[1] This was the truth, but I quite believe that Martial would have refused to believe it, and resolutely responded like the young man whom he lectured: 'What would you have? I have made up my mind to go.'

He set out, then, and arrived at Rome precisely at one of the gloomiest moments in the history of the Empire; it was the very year of the great fire, when half the city was burning. He was a spectator of the dramas that followed: the death of Nero, the revolutions which successively gave the Empire to Galba, to Otho, and to Vitellius; the triumph of the Flavian dynasty. What did he do amid all these catastrophes, while they were fighting in the streets, laying siege to the Capitol, and setting it on fire? We are absolutely ignorant. Nor do we know what kind of life he led under Vespasian. As none of the works composed during that period have been preserved, sixteen years of his life entirely escape us. But we shall run small risk of being misled in conjecturing that he was doing then what he always did, what it was his nature and his habit to do. For example, we may be sure that, from the moment of his arrival, he sought to slip into intimacy with some great persons. It has been surmised that he must first have addressed himself to people of his own country, who had come to Rome before him, and whose fortunes were made. Their number was somewhat considerable, and, according to custom, they formed a colony in the great city where the newcomer might find some support. No doubt Martial, poor and unknown, did not fail to avail himself of this resource. We note that, until the end, he remained in touch with the Spanish residents at Rome, and got on well with them. He often addressed verses to Decianus of Emerita, an advocate who was at the same time a Stoic philosopher, but a discreet Stoic who desired no embroilment with authority; to

[1] iii. 38.

Canius Rufus of Gades, an historian and poet when he was in the mood for it, a talker so witty that 'had he been in the place of the Sirens, Ulysses would never have had courage to stop up his ears'; and to many others of his compatriots. He must certainly have known Seneca also; no Spaniards came to Rome without attempting to approach the man who was his country's glory; and Seneca could not have repulsed them. He had acquired the tastes and fashions of that old aristocracy to which his position and fortune had given him admittance, and it probably did not displease him to find at his rising from bed the host of clients who forthwith accompanied him through the streets of Rome. His care to inform us that, in later days, he has taken to travelling simply in a single carriage, with neither couriers to precede him nor baggage to follow, clearly indicates that it had not been habitual with him. He must, then, have been hospitable to those who came to swell his body of clients, above all when they were men of intellect, in whom a pride could be taken.[1] But Martial had not time to profit by the patronage of Seneca, whom Nero put to death in the following year, in connection with Piso's conspiracy. The poet did not the less remain faithful to the memory of the great man of whom he had had but a glimpse; he continued linked with his friends; he celebrated in verse Cæsonius Maximus, whose friendship with Seneca condemned him to exile, and Ovid who bore him company; he also wrote a poem for the anniversary of Lucan's birth, at the request of his widow, Argentaria Polla. It would appear, then, that Martial's *début* in Rome was not unprosperous; he apparently found friends and powerful patrons. And thus, in the sequel, when liberalities grew rarer and it was hard for him to scrape a living, he sadly observed: 'Give me back the men of the past: the Pisones, the Senecæ, the Memmii, the Crispi'[2]—those were the good old days!

[1] xii. 36: I do not know, however, if we can say with Friedländer that Martial was an habitual client of Seneca's. In one of his epigrams he reproaches himself with having preferred to the fortunes of the Pisones and Senecæ, then intact, the friendship of Posthumus, who gave him nothing.

[2] iv. 10.

III

How Martial published his first collection. The festivals for the inauguration of the Colosseum. The explanation of their importance. Martial's celebration of them. The results for him from the publication of the *Liber de Spectaculis*.

An extraordinary occasion was required for Martial to publish his first volume of poems. In 80, the last year of the life of Titus, the Colosseum (*Amphitheatrum Flavium*) was inaugurated. It was not only a gigantic festival; it was an act of profound policy. It was absolutely necessary to wipe out the memory of Nero. Although he had been dead for eleven years, the populace had not forgotten him, and the prestige of the new monarchy had to suffer this long-lived affection. That last descendant of a great race was loved, not only for the marvellous entertainments he had given, but for his birth, his pomp, his prodigalities, his mad building schemes, which flattered the tastes of the multitude. Albeit Nero made pretensions to being an enthusiastic admirer of Greek art, he was quite a Roman. He preferred grandeur to beauty, and he only deemed grand what surpassed ordinary proportions. The construction of his palace had been his latest whim. The Palatine seemed to him cramped, mean, inconvenient; to rebuild it according to his own ideas he required an immense area of which he should be absolute master. It was alleged that he had set fire to Rome in order to procure it: this hasty expropriation had the advantage of relieving him, not only of the private properties, which he could only acquire at a high price, but of temples and other ancient buildings, the destruction of which it would have been hard to sanction. In this devastated wilderness he built his house, a house glittering with marble and gold, encrusted with diamonds, furnished with masterpieces, having chambers the ceilings of which were movable and rained down flowers and perfumes. But what really constituted the originality of the structure was this: he had the strange notion of placing in the midst

of Rome all the characteristic features of an opulent Roman villa—the Palace of Versailles on the Place du Carrousel: there were meadows, parks, porticoes, forests and game preserves; in the centre a vast fishpond, surrounded by a whole city of buildings; basins into which had been conveyed the water of the Ostian Sea (fifteen miles away), fountains from which gushed the sulphurous waters of Tivoli. At the entrance a colossal statue of the prince, one hundred and twenty feet high, welcomed the guests. When Nero died all was nearly completed. The Emperor Otho, who momentarily had the idea of giving it the finishing touches, asserted that it would scarce cost more than £400,000—a mere fleabite—to complete it.

The construction of the Golden House had been a great irritation to the wealthy class, which had to bear the expense of it. On this occasion spiteful verses were scribbled on the walls. 'Rome,' there could be read, 'has become the habitation of a single man. 'Tis the moment, citizens, to emigrate to Veii, unless indeed Veii itself be comprised in Cæsar's house.' But the people who had not to stump up were smitten with admiration by these follies. And so the Flavian Emperors, to baffle recollections, took the resolution of transforming these monstrous buildings, and giving the whole quarter between Mount Cælius, the Esquiline and the Velia a new aspect. The colossus was decapitated and the head replaced by that of the Sun. Where the imperial palace had risen, Titus built his thermal baths, such fine remains of which survive, and the Colosseum occupied the site of the great fishpond. It was thought that the magnificence of the new buildings would eclipse the recollection of the old, and that was why there was a desire to give the festivities in celebration of its inauguration an extraordinary splendour.

To these spectacles people flocked from all parts of the world: 'There were to be seen the inhabitant of Hæmus, the Arab, the Sabæan, the Sarmatian who quenches his thirst with the blood of his steed, and those who drink the water of the Nile at its source, the Sicambrian with his curly hair, and the Ethiopian

with his woolly crop; and all tongues were to be heard resounding on every side.'[1] Martial, as we may suppose, did not fail to attend, and, the pageants finished, or even while they were still in progress, he celebrated what had been passing before his eyes in some short poems, which he communicated to his friends. Was it he himself who, when the festivities were over, had the thought of collecting these verses, or did he receive a command to do so? We do not know, but, all the same, in doing so he was promoting the imperial policy. He very clearly explains his intentions when he says: 'Rome is at last restored to herself. Thanks to thee, O Cæsar, a whole people enjoys that which only pandered to the pleasures of a single man.'[2] It was specially important that the memory of these feasts should be preserved, and the impression they had made communicated to those who had not witnessed them. This was what Martial did, and it is through him as a medium that they live for us to-day. His little book deserves a reading, incomplete and ill-arranged though it be unfortunately,[3] to acquire some idea of the entertainments.

As on this occasion they lasted for a hundred days running, and it was necessary to keep public interest on the alert, the spectacles had to be varied. To what, as a rule, was made their foundation: gladiatorial combats, *naumachia* (sea-fights), chariot races, exhibitions of savage or tamed animals, hunts in which as many as nine or ten thousand beasts were slain, were added novel or less stale pleasures. This time the special attraction seems to have mainly consisted in scenes from history or mythology. There was, for instance, in the flooded arena the sea-fight between the peoples of Corinth and Corcyra, or the sports of the Nereids on the billows, or Leander swimming the Hellespont to see his mistress, and apparently saying to the angry waves, 'Let me but reach the

[1] *De Spect.* 3. [2] *De Spect.* 2.

[3] The *Liber de Spectaculis* has come down to us in a very mutilated form. When compared with the account given by Dion Cassius of the opening of the Colosseum, there can be no doubt that it was composed for that occasion; but it is possible that Martial may have published other editions into which he introduced some accounts of games given later by Domitian. See what Friedländer says on this point.

shore, and only drown me on the way back.' In order, however, that the spectacle should be quite to Roman taste, it had to be set off with certain embellishments to which they were accustomed. It is notorious, for example, that they revelled in bloodshed; and so to the gayest scenes were added lugubrious catastrophes. In a beautiful background, recalling the grove of the Hesperides, Orpheus is enchanting nature with his songs; but, when the audience is supposed to have had enough of the sight of trees and rocks moving in harmony, a wild beast is let loose which tears the poor wretch in pieces. The brigand Lauroleus was the hero of a comedy much appreciated by the Romans; it represents a thief at odds with the police and playing off tricks on them, a popular pastime in every country of the world. The police, rightly enough, end by winning the game, and Lauroleus is crucified. But this punishment seems very slow to the spectators, and it is necessary to bring a Caledonian bear upon the scene to throw itself upon the victim and despatch him. The multitude lost nothing of his agony. 'The blood gushed from his living members. His flesh fell in shreds. No part of his body preserved its human form.'[1] Martial's pleasure in describing these horrors enables us to divine what the multitude experienced in beholding them. We sometimes find it hard to comprehend how the century of the Antonines could have presented such singular contrasts; it seems inexplicable how a morality of such purity and elevation as so many then professed, could subsist with feelings so cruel. Martial's little book helps us to solve this problem. It was that, side by side with the school of the sages which preached humanity, there was the school of the amphitheatre which taught ferocity.

The book *On the Spectacles* had the result to the author of giving him more direct relations with the prince. It is quite likely that Martial, though in constant quest of patrons, had never yet addressed himself so high. Vespasian was a good economical man of the middle class, who could have been of no humour to spend

[1] *De Spect.* 7.

much in the encouragement of poetry.[1] There was a change under Titus, who prided himself on being a man of the world and cultivating the arts of Greece. To the poet who had celebrated him in song he promised rewards which he had not time to bestow, for he expired shortly after the feasts were concluded. Naturally, Martial claimed them from his successor. This was Domitian, his brother, who might have been imagined a friend to literature, since he had written verses in his youth, and, according to Quintilian, 'had only ceased to write them, because the gods did not deem it a sufficient glory for him to be the greatest of poets.' Martial cherished the hope that poetry had at last found its Mæcenas, and thenceforth never ceased bombarding the prince with his flatteries.

Another, and a more important, consequence of this first work was that it inspired him with the idea of publishing all that he might compose thereafter. He must have coined a large number of epigrams since coming to Rome, and they had scored a great success, for, at the beginning of the first book of those we possess, he says that he is 'known throughout the universe.' Why, then, had he not collected and published them as he did later? It was no doubt because he did not attach much importance to his works, until he noticed the esteem in which they were held by the cultured. As a rule they were topical pieces, and it might seem to him that they did not deserve to survive the occasion of their birth.[2] He did not, then, apply to a bookseller; a young slave called Demetrius, a skilful scribe, whom he had in his house, copied them in his best handwriting, and they were sent to him for whom they had been composed. Thenceforth they belonged to him. Naturally, the person whose generosity they celebrated did

[1] We know, however, from Tacitus that he one day made a present to the poet Saleius Bassus of 500,000 sesterces (£4000); but this must have been an exception, for, in the same chapter, Tacitus avers that poetry does not lead to fortune.

[2] We must suppose this opinion generally shared, since Statius was blamed for publishing his *Silvæ*, and it was considered over-great attachment of importance to trifles; and yet the *Silvæ* were pieces of great charm, which often had the epic form and deserved to live. If people were so severe upon them, what must they have thought of Martial's little epigrams?

not hide them under a bushel: he read them to his friends and acquaintances, and hoarded them as precious possessions. It was well-known that, if required, they would be found in his keeping, and there it was, in fact, that, later, they were sought out. When Martial had achieved renown, a well-advised bookseller had the idea of collecting the little poems which their author had neglected to publish, and putting out an edition of them. Martial, not ill-pleased, undertook to commend it to the public: 'All that it befell me to write when I was young, almost a child, silly trifles which I have myself forgotten, if you wish, friendly reader, to waste a few hours you might put to better use, you shall find at the shop of Quintus Pollius Valerianus; that man has promised that none of these trifles I have written shall perish.' But if Martial's pieces, even without being published, ran no risk of being lost, they were exposed to other perils. Many who had heard them read in fashionable assemblies where they had enraptured listeners knew them by heart, repeated them, and ended by claiming them as their own. There were some even who retailed them in the provinces, where it was harder to convict them of fraud, and thus acquired a local reputation at the real author's expense. The only means to prevent this usurpation was effectively to assert his rights; and this he could only do by himself collecting his works and giving them to the public under his own name. Thenceforth he was in the habit of publishing every year with Secundus, Atrectus, or Trephon, booksellers of repute, a book of one hundred epigrams.

IV

The epigram. Roman society in the epigrams of Martial. Types and portraits. Women. Who are those to whom Martial addresses his epigrams?

We possess nothing of Martial's save epigrams, and probably he did not write anything else: he seems to have made a speciality of this form of verse. We know that the word *epigram* had among

the ancients a much wider significance than it has to-day. It was, properly speaking, a short inscription of a few lines, and it denoted the epitaph on a tomb, or the dedication of an altar, as well as some malicious skit scribbled on a wall. With Martial satire predominates in the epigram. It is scarce more in his case than a few lines of verse, sprightly, vivacious and witty, which humorously tells some anecdote, banters an eccentricity, or cracks a joke. As the interest is mainly in the quip with which it concludes, he prepares his reader for it in advance, and, from the start, all leads up to the final sting. This method of proceeding, which is nearly the same in all, risks making them seem in time monotonous, and when a large number are accumulated, one upon another, the monotony grows still more sensible. Martial, as a man of taste, was aware of it, and so he is careful to apologise for his epigrams. From the outset he frankly confesses that all is not irreproachable in his works: 'There are good things in them, there are middling, there are yet more that are bad.' But we must not be too hard on epigrams. If but one half be good, that suffices; the rest must stand excused. Besides what need of reading them all at once? Do you think there are too many? then only read a few; you will turn to the others later. This counsel is sound: Martial is one of those authors who should be taken in moderate doses and at intervals.

But the true method for finding pleasure in his study is to put yourself back in his time, to pass with him for a moment into his life and that of the people with whom he associated. It was a wealthy society, restricted and select; he is very careful to tell us that he does not address himself to everybody: 'Others write for the multitude; for my part I only aim at pleasing the few'; he wishes to divert men of taste, men of wit accustomed to light conversation, who are not startled at a risky story, who pardon a piece of foolery, if it be but neatly put. His book seems to deserve another fate than that of being solemnly stored in a library cheek by jowl with works of philosophy and science, and from time to time being consulted by persons of a serious turn of mind. As it

is compact in form, of agreeable aspect and quite portable, it can be carried under the toga and taken out and read under the porticoes or carried to those dinner-parties where a good company is assembled. Towards the end of the repast, when the guests are tired of talking charioteers and horses, or retailing the scandal of the day, they will pass to Martial's latest epigrams and regale themselves therewith. It is hardly a change of subject, for Martial too likes to speak of all that attracts the frivolous curiosity of the idlers of the fashionable world; he is always chatting of the minor incidents of the public games—of the snow which fell one day in the middle of the performance without either Emperor or public leaving their places; of the actor who played the part of Mucius Scævola, and so bravely held his hand in the flaming brazier; of the lion which devoured its keeper, and played with a little hare which had taken refuge between its paws; to these add the good stories current in town, naughty anecdotes and other improprieties, to which the ladies are besought not to listen, so as to make sure that they will strain their ears the better to hear them.

It cannot be said that Martial tells us much that is very new about contemporary society; he was not free enough to speak of it as he would have wished; in his position of dependence on the people about him, it was inadvisable to find fault with any one. He is constantly protesting against those who would find malicious allusions in his verses; *ludimus innocue*. So timid a man could not be a very profound observer. For fear of compromising himself he lingers in the commonplaces of everyday ethics; he attacks the misers and the prodigals, those who do nothing and those who do too much; the rich man who permits the belief that he is poor, for fear he may be forced to be generous; the poor man who wants to pass for being rich and at night, to defray the day's expenses, pawns his ring; the insolent upstart, for ever bragging of his fortune; the legacy-hunter; the parasite in quest of a dinner; the poet who assassinates every one in his verses, and so on. These are real and vital figures, but of slight originality and not drawn in strong relief.

His painting of women is not carried to the point of blackness as in Juvenal. At bottom, however, he forms pretty nearly the same estimate of them. It is clear from what he says that they are quite emancipated from the servitude and seclusion of old; they go into society, they accompany their husbands to banquets; seated on their high chairs, they await their visitors who come to pay their respects and tell them the news. What caused their independence was that they held their fortune apart from their husbands', and guarded it jealously,[1] so as to be able to carry it off on the day of divorce—and divorces were so frequent! To administer their property they selected a steward, and, if we are to believe that evil tongue of Martial's, this steward was sometimes a very pretty boy: 'Tell me, my dear Marianus, who is that little curled darling, who never quits your wife's side, who leans on the back of her chair, and is for ever bending down to whisper some sweet nothing in her ear? His legs are free of every hair, and dainty rings crowd his every finger. You answer me that he is her steward. Poor fool!—how fit are you to play the part of simpleton at the theatre by the side of Latinus! 'Tis not your wife's business that he does, but rather yours.'[2] It is evident that the women were not content to use the independence they had won; many abused it. To prove conclusively to themselves and convince the whole world that there was no inequality between themselves and men, they assumed their weaknesses, made a display of their absurdities, and invaded their professions; they affected no longer to speak anything but Greek, they posed as bluestockings and pedants, they studied philosophy, they wrote poems, even love poems. One of them, Sulpicia, the wife of Calenus, was famous for her terribly passionate poems; it is true they were addressed to her husband, which disarms the severest critic. Martial admires her like every one else, he compares her to Sappho and the nymph Egeria.[3] But, in speaking thus, he does

[1] From the praise accorded by Martial to one of them who merged her fortune in her husband's, we find that was a very rare exception.

[2] v. 61 x. 35; vii. 69.

not quite express what he thinks: in reality these talents which women are seeking to acquire cause him disquietude. He longs, for his own part, that she whom he marries—if he ever does marry—will not be too learned; the equality they would fain establish betwixt men and women is to him of no good omen, and he avails himself of old Cato's saying: 'On the day they are our equals they shall be our masters':—

'Inferior matrona suo sit, Prisce, marito.
Non aliter fient femina virque pares.'

To complete this picture of fashionable life of which Martial affords us a glimpse, we must place beside the woman who tricks herself out, who bedizens herself, who paints her face, 'who dreads the rain because she has powdered herself, and the sun because she has laid on rouge'—her companion, the man of fashion, whom the poet calls the coxcomb or the curled exquisite, *bellus homo, crispulus*. He is somewhat of a newcomer in Roman society; he was almost unknown at the Republican epoch, and so he never figures in the comedies of that age. Perhaps we might find him in the mimes of the Augustan epoch, when private life was readily put on the stage, where you could see the lover, surprised by the unexpected return of the husband, taking refuge in a chest. There are already some traces of his presence in Ovid's *Art of Love*, but it is Martial who has depicted him to the life. 'A coxcomb is a man whose hair has a well-made parting always smelling of perfumes, who hums between his teeth the ditties of Egypt and Spain, and can beat time with his hairless arms; who never, the whole day, stirs from the ladies' chairs and has always something to tell them, who reads through the letters they have received from various quarters and undertakes to reply to them; whose one great object in life is to preserve his clothes from being rumpled by his neighbour's elbow, who knows the tattle of the town and will tell you the name of the woman of whom such an one is enamoured, who is a constant diner-out and can rehearse the whole pedigree of the horse Hirpinus.'[1] Here, in a few

[1] iii. 63.

lines, we have a finished portrait, which puts the fellow before our eyes.

People have been right in trying to discover who the persons are to whom Martial addresses his epigrams[1]: they consist of nearly the whole of the distinguished society of the time. We first come across the servants, the freedmen of the prince, those, that is to say, who, under his name, govern the Empire; then, what remains of the old aristocracy, much diminished and sorely impoverished by the tyranny of the Cæsars, and the new nobility in course of replacing it; provincial governors, generals of armies, senators who have for long held high place; others, less known but already making their mark, like that Palfurius Sura, Trajan's friend, for whom the future reserved so brilliant a fortune. Add to these the wealthy patrons of the arts, the amateurs, the collectors, the lettered men of the world of society—Silius Italicus, who had written an epic poem, and that Arruntius Stella, a king of fashion and a writer of precious little poems, 'into which he put as many pearls and brilliants as he wore upon his fingers.' Tacitus is not included in the list; he was too serious a person for that, and must have been mildly horrified by Martial's playful muse; but we find in it his friend, the younger Pliny, whom the poet only approaches with respect, and who reminds him of Cato. One of the most curious in the list is that Antonius Primus who had his hour of celebrity. He belonged to Toulouse, and his compatriots had, in the patois of their country, surnamed him Becco (the man with the big nose). Condemned under Nero for the crime of forgery, he had found means to remount the saddle, and, on the death of Otho, he commanded a legion in the army of Pannonia. He resolutely declared for Vespasian, threw himself upon Italy, though he had been ordered to do nothing of the kind, defeated Vitellius in defiance of everybody, pillaged and burnt Cremona, and took Rome by storm. His soldiers worshipped

[1] See Giese, *De personis a Martiale commemoratis*. See also the *index nominum*, which Mommsen has inserted in the second edition of Keil's letters of Pliny. The persons of whom Martial speaks are often to be found in Pliny.

him, and would follow no other leader; he fascinated them by his audacity, by his ready tongue. In the councils of war he talked more loudly than the others, so as to be heard by the centurions outside the tent. In the thickest of the fight he passed through the ranks, finding a word for each, encouraging the brave, treating the cowards as *pékins* (*pagani*), always ready, if he saw them wavering, to snatch up the eagle and throw himself upon the foe. He was one of those heroic soldiers of fortune whom factions use during a struggle, and who are given the cold shoulder after success has been won. He, the war at an end, disappears from history, and we should not know what became of him, did we not find him again in Martial. He had gone back to Toulouse and was peacefully waxing old there. As he was well pleased that accounts of the life of Rome should still reach him in his retirement, he read Martial's epigrams; the poet had been careful to forward them to him himself, remarking that a book has more value when it comes directly from the author than when it is purchased at the bookseller's. This individual truly deserves to be never forgotten; he is the first Gascon whose memory has been kept green.

V

Statius and Martial. Juvenal. What he has in common with Martial. Wherein he differs from him.

Among the important men of this period were two great poets: Statius and Juvenal. Martial has never spoken a word of the former, though assuredly he must have known him; he was the latter's intimate friend.

The destinies of Martial and Statius offer surprising resemblances. Both were born out of Rome and much attached to their native land, which they never ceased to regret; both returned thither to die. At Rome both practised the same business: they tried to live on the liberality of the prince or of wealthy men, and neither one nor other succeeded. They were rivals, then, and rivals for the bounty of the same persons. Nearly all the names

just cited with reference to Martial's epigrams are also to be found in the *Silvæ* of Statius. On the same people they lavished the same flatteries; on many occasions they treated the same subjects. Both sang the marriage of Stella, mourned the death of Glaucias, the cherished slave of Atedius Melior, celebrated the birthday of Lucan, described the baths of Claudius Etruscus or that charming statue of Lysippus of which Nonius Vindex was the proud possessor, wrote verses for Earinus, a young eunuch of the palace who had shorn off his hair and made an offering of it to the temple of Æsculapius at Pergamos. It is no mere accident that they coincide thus. They confess that they work to order, and those who paid them found a keen relish in making two famous poets compete with each other; as, amongst ourselves, did the Duchess of Orleans, when she engaged Corneille and Racine each to write a *Bérénice*. We are certain that Martial and Statius knew the same people and frequented the same houses: how does it happen that they never mentioned each other?

What may explain the silence, apart from the very natural mutual jealousy of men whom people found amusing to set up against each other, is that they differed widely in character, and that, although they pursued the same profession, they did not pursue it in the same fashion. Martial brings to it a kind of ingenuity, sometimes a slightly brutal candour. He considers it quite natural that the compliments he distributes should be paid for, and if the fee be tardy or seems too meagre, he complains or loses his temper: 'One I have eulogised feigns to know it not, and behaves as though he owed me nought: I am robbed.'[1] Statius does not adopt the same attitude; in reality he is ready to do all that is required of him, like Martial; if his patron desire it, he will lament, with the same emotion, the death of his wife, of his minion, or of his parrot, but outwardly at least he uses more ceremony. He is careful not to allow it to be supposed that he counts on deriving any profit from his obliging them thus; he would fain have us believe that the persons he addresses are his

[1] v. 36: *Imposuit*, properly and familiarly, 'He has put me inside.'

friends, that it is solely for his own personal satisfaction that he sings their sorrows and their joys, that he lives on intimate terms with them. If he dilate on the beauties of their villa, it is because he has one day been pressed to stay when he was passing on his way elsewhere. He praises the works of art to be seen in their house, since he admired them at a dinner-party to which he had been invited. Once even he seems to say that he does not write poetry for everybody, and that it is necessary to be worthy of it and to appreciate its value. It is because he has a supreme self-conceit and reverences in himself epic poetry, of which he is proud to be one of the noblest representatives. Consider that he was an improviser by temperament, almost from birth, for he was a Neapolitan, and that he had taken it upon himself to compose an epic which cost him twelve years' labour. To have written the *Thebaid* is a sort of dignity which he is loth to compromise; it is also a glory which, in the hierarchy of poetry, ranks him above the mere epigrammatist. Naturally enough then it may have happened that he made the others feel this high opinion which he had of himself, and that Martial was thereby offended.

On the other hand, Martial seems to have been on very good terms with Juvenal. In one of the pieces he addresses to him he compares their friendship to that of Theseus and Perithous, Castor and Pollux, Orestes and Pylades. How could so close an intimacy have been contracted? At a first glance it is hardly credible, and it is only the contrasts between the two men that strike us. The persons whom the one overwhelms with compliments are precisely those most detestable to the other. One can scarce imagine Juvenal listening calmly to the epigrams in which his friend celebrates the *God* Domitian, and in which he so basely flatters his retainers, among them that Crispinus, a Græco-Egyptian half-breed, whom the satirist never wearies of mangling: *Ecce iterum Crispinus.* The judgments they pass upon their time are diametrically opposed. Whilst Juvenal proclaims 'that corruption is at its zenith and can go no farther, that, so far as vice is concerned, he defies the future to imagine anything new,'

Martial considers that, taking all into account, the century in which he lives is a blissful epoch, and that, were only the poets a little better paid, he would have nothing left to desire. 'When has Rome been more glorious, more peaceful? When has more liberty been enjoyed?'[1] It is so to such a pitch, that Cato, were he to return, would return a Cæsarian.[2] Between the two, it is plain, the antagonism is complete. And yet, by careful investigation, a point—a single point—is to be perceived, on which they are agreed. Juvenal affirms that if he has been tardy in writing his poems and publishing them, it is because he has had to avenge himself on all the paltry literary efforts to which he has been forced to listen at the public readings, and he takes the opportunity to scoff at those interminable *Telephos'* and *Orestes'*, with their descriptions of storms, their descents to the shades, and all the old lumber to which their too indulgent hearers had to submit. Nor can Martial either stand these lengthy and ponderous poems, and he never ceases making fun of them, the more so since their authors believed they had a right to despise him, seeing that he had only written short pieces of no consequence. He retorts to their scorn by declaring that nobody can stomach those epics which recount in eight or ten thousand verses the adventures of Medea or Agamemnon: 'These are works which people pretend to admire in company but shut up when alone.'[3]

Not only do these epics seem to him boring, but he charges them with a graver fault, upon which we must insist, for it will enlighten us on the grounds of his opinions and afford us a better appreciation of the originality of his talent. These mythological subjects were so ancient, they had attracted so great a number of poets in Greece and Rome, they had been worked over in so many fashions, that it was very hard for any one desirous of presenting them again to devise anything new. As soon as he sets to work, memories of what has already been done awake in his

[1] v. 19. [2] xi. 5: *si Cato reddatur Cæsarinus erit.*
[3] iv. 49: *laudant illa, sed ista legant.*

mind; they obsess him, they hamper him, they interpose between him and the sentiments he wishes to express, to such an extent that he is no longer able to keep in touch with nature and truth. He has no longer aught to offer but reminiscences, and his work, whatever he may do, is but a tissue of artifice and routine. This was what Martial could not stand, what was absolutely contrary to his nature and methods. He delights in assailing with the piquant mirth of his epigrams, in which contemporary society recognises itself with delight, those long-winded and puerile poems which the schoolmaster recites to his pupils in his hoarse voice, 'and which are the torture of the young girl already well-grown and of the nice little boy.'[1] 'What pleasure,' he adds, 'can be taken in books of such solemn nonsense? Rather read those in which life seems to say to you, "Behold me. In me you will find neither Centaurs, nor Harpies, nor Gorgons; but on every page man breathes and lives."' Man and life, *homo, vita*, words which he likes to use, are what characterise his work best. No other man in Latin literature is more alive and more sincere. He hardly uses the generalisations which formed the substance of the poetry of his time; he never has recourse to those vague descriptions with which every one about him is satisfied. All turns in his works on distinct and precise details. He instructs us how a great lord spends his day, hour by hour; he introduces us to all the quarters where a parasite may hope to find some one to ask him to dinner; we might retrace the route with his aid. When he saunters along the streets of Rome, he notes the people to be usually met there: sulphur match-sellers, those who retail salads or hot peas, those who go about offering their smoking sausages in the taverns, beggars of every species, from the little Jew, trained by his mother to ask for alms, to the poor shipwrecked mariner who tells with woeful voice of the storm in which he had thought to perish, and shows a picture of it. It is thus that he amuses himself by enumerating the small details which unfold before our eyes the life

[1] These lines of Martial prove that in the Roman schools boys and girls were often educated together.

of every day.[1] Statius takes a different course. As he desires, above all else, to exalt and ennoble his subject, he avoids as much as he can such details as he thinks homely, and assiduously avails himself of the unwieldy machinery for which the conventions of epic poetry gave him a taste; in referring to some commonplace incident—a departure or an arrival, a marriage, the decorations of a villa, the construction of a public road, he evokes the ancient legends, brings the gods on the scene in talking parts, and determinedly banishes all sense of reality. He is diametrically the opposite to Martial.

As for Juvenal, it can be affirmed, though appearances are against it, that he is at bottom of the same school as his friend. We have seen that, like him, he detests the great mythological epics, and that is the reason he gives to explain why he has taken to writing verse. There lingers in him a bitter rancour against mythology; never does he speak of any god, even of the greater, without letting fall some irreverence, and his tone is always ironical when he recounts the most revered legends. Hardly can we doubt that he shared Martial's taste for all that was truth and life; but, as he readily goes to extremes, it is not so much the true expression that he likes, as the blunt expression. I do not believe that there is in Latin literature a picture of more repulsive realism than that of old age in the tenth Satire. But Juvenal's realism has an element of violence and exaggeration, whilst that of Martial simply consists in seeing things as they are, and relating them as he sees them. The fact is that Juvenal had been too long the pupil and the rival of the rhetors; the habit was formed at the time when he took leave of rhetoric; he wanted to throw it

[1] It is natural that these realistic sketches of the life of yore, to be found in Martial, should often recall the life of to-day. Applications of this sort suggest themselves. We read in the *Ménagiana*, 'There is no Latin poet in whom there are so many things that might fall in conversation as in Martial. All is to be found in him. Somebody asked me one day whether I should find the cloak of M. de Varillas there. I replied offhand without hesitation:

Dimidiasque nates gallica palla tegit.'

I quote this from the *Essai sur Trajan* of M. de la Berge, which contains a very just and acute appreciation of Martial.

off, but it never forsook him. It manifests itself in him by breadth and emphasis in exposition, by hyperboles in language, by a somewhat external and factitious warmth, above all by a certain way he has of selecting as his subjects regular theses, and treating them in the manner of the schools, piling up, rather at random, arguments good or bad, more concerned to hit hard than to hit fairly. But if, as a rule, he surrenders to rhetoric, he sometimes also resists it. It is thus at least that I explain certain very singular passages in his works, in which an impassioned tirade, into which he seems to have put his whole heart, makes a sudden deviation and concludes with an unexpected jest.[1] Is not this rapid change of front a precaution against himself, because he feels that his subject is running away with him, because he fears to lose his self-control, and has a dread of declaiming? So he voluntarily decides to clip his wings, and, sooner than leave his inspiration to culminate in declamation, he turns it into mockery. This being so, we must not see in these abrupt variations of tone, as some have done, a self-contradiction; they are rather the consequence of the battle raging within him, between his literary taste and his rhetor's habits.

We find nothing similar in Martial. To remain simple and natural demanded no effort on his part: it was his very nature, and he could say with an entire assurance that every sort of bombast was absent from his books:

A nostris procul est omnis vesica libellis.[2]

It was a rare merit at the time in which he lived. Of all the writers of the Empire I scarce know more than two who were able to abstain so completely from rhetoric: Petronius and himself.

VI

The sorry condition of the poets of the time. How could they find a living? Public readings. The necessity of patrons. The poet at his patron's. The morning *salutatio*. The *sportula*. Literature puts itself under the Emperor's protection.

I fear I have given a hardly favourable idea of Martial in saying

[1] See especially: *Sat.* i. 79-80, and *Sat.* viii. 85-86. [2] iv. 49.

just now that he had no other business than to address wealthy people with compliments, for which he was paid, and that he felt no shame in the matter. It is, unfortunately, what results from the reading of his epigrams. By his manner of inciting the liberalities of his patrons, it is clear that he did not suspect that it would one day be made a reproach on him. He does not wait for what is given him; he wearies not in begging, he is for ever crying out his want; he must have money—to indemnify his creditors, to pay his rent, to renew his wardrobe when worn out. Apart from the fact that he is not easily satisfied, any largess he receives seems to give him the right to solicit another. The chamberlain of the Emperor, Parthenius, having made him a present of a fine toga, his gratitude and admiration know no bounds: it is a marvel which nothing can equal, nowhere can its like be found: 'Tis whiter than the lily and than the flower of the freshly blown privet.' But of a sudden a scruple occurs to him which he cannot forbear from expressing. Is it not to be feared that the beauty of the toga may make his old cloak seem too shabby? Which is one way of begging a cloak also.[1]

Not to be too severe upon him, let us consider what was then the position of men of letters. We are tempted to believe it brilliant, when we recall the taste which that society professed for literature, and the great number of those who practised it; in reality it has rarely been more wretched. A poet, for instance, had scarce any means of living by his pen. The theatre was barred to him, since comedies and tragedies were only represented there as an exception; true, he might put his books on sale, and, if he had talent, he was sure of having readers; but, even if they sold well, the profits did not come to him. The idea had not yet occurred to any one that a book belongs to its author as much as a field or house to its owner, and that the State owes it to him to

[1] viii. 23. Elsewhere in thanking his friend Stella for repairing the roof of his little villa, damaged by winter storms, he remarks to him that 'since he has covered the house, he might well cover the proprietor likewise.' This importunity of Martial's in begging clothes is explained when we know that the obligation he was under of dressing stylishly every morning to go and salute his patron, made him wear out four togas a year. It was a great expense.

guarantee his copyright. A copy of the book could be purchased as soon as it was published, copied as often as wished, and what copies were not kept for personal use given to friends or sold to the public. Under these circumstances a bookseller would have been defrauded had he paid dear for a book which everybody next day was at liberty to reproduce and circulate. We can understand, then, that he paid very little, or did not pay at all, for the work the author brought him.[1] In this manner he shared his profits with nobody and did a good business. The bookselling trade, which hardly existed before the Empire, was then flourishing. Martial had at Rome a certain number of publishers whose names and addresses he mentions; it is probable that each of them sold his epigrams under different forms and at different prices. One of them, Secundus, whose shop was behind the temple of Peace, had brought out a handy edition in a small volume which was no burden to the hand, and could be taken in a carriage. Atrectus, on the contrary, who, near the Forum of Cæsar, had a fine shop with a front on which the names of all the fashionable authors were displayed, specialised in *éditions de luxe*, 'the bindings of which were carefully polished with pumice-stone and enriched with purple.' A book of epigrams by Martial cost at this shop four *denarii* (2s. 8d.). Tryphon, who was also Quintilian's publisher, was, it seems, much less dear. Martial says that for one of his books he was content to take four or even two sesterces (4d.); it is true that the work in question was the *Xenia*, a pamphlet of small importance, containing just two hundred mottoes for Saturnalia gifts; even in selling it so cheap Tryphon was able to make a profit. Let us add that it was not only at Rome that Martial's books had a sale; they were exported to the provinces, where they were much appreciated. But from this lucrative trade there was no return for the poor poet. It is he who tells us so, and, although he usually seems resigned to this injustice, he

[1] Th. Birt (*Das antike Buchwesen*) thinks that authors drew some royalty from their works. L. Haenny (*Schriftsteller und Buchhändler im alten Rom*) considers they got nothing, and I quite believe the texts confirm him.

cannot, in this case, refrain from remarking with some bitterness: 'They tell me that my poems are sung in Britain, but what good is that to me? My purse knows nought of it.'[1]

The other methods by which the poets of those days sought to secure a reputation were not more favourable to their fortunes. The public readings, for example, which were so much in vogue, cost a lot and brought in nothing. A hall had to be rented and furnished, chairs hired to be placed in the orchestra, benches which represented the tiers, the chair on which the reader sat; it was necessary to issue invitations and renew them more than once to refresh the memories of the invited. Not only did the hearers pay nothing, but often some of them were paid to applaud at effective passages. Statius had no need of recourse to this dodge; his success was assured. When he read his *Thebaïd*, it was a delight for all the cultured people of Rome, and the plaudits shook the hall, which did not prevent him, Juvenal tells us, from having nothing to eat when he returned home.[2] The literary competitions, which had greatly multiplied, and in which, since Nero, poetry had figured, scarce afforded more profit; crowns and palms were usually awarded to the winners. The father of Statius, who had carried off prizes at all the Greek games, was none the less compelled to open a school in order to find a living.

All this Martial knew in advance; he cherished no delusions on the profits he might derive from the sale of his books, and it does not appear that he ever sought the prizes of the literary contests. The only resource upon which he counted was that which all poets had used before him, the liberality of wealthy men, and we have seen that he solicited it without shame. To-day we have grown more squeamish, and the idea we have formed of the dignity of the man of letters renders these solicitations of Martial's highly shocking. But do not let us forget that such scruples are fairly recent; our seventeenth century knew them not. Writers had no repugnance then to receiving pensions or gifts from great people, to sitting at their tables, living in their town-houses, and in

[1] xi. 3. [2] Juvenal, vii. 82.

forming part of their suites. Corneille said of himself that he 'had the honour to belong to M. le Cardinal,' and among those who first formed the Academy, many were proud to be called 'the servants of M. le Chancelier.' I must add that contemporary men of letters have not grown so independent as they allege; what they have done is to change their servitude. Slaves of the public, they espy its tastes, anticipate its desires, and there are not lacking some who are ready to stoop to all infamies in order to satisfy it. Moreover, what was objectionable in this dependence of writers on the subsidies of the rich was in part covered and veiled by the ancient institution of clientage. It exists in all aristocratic countries, respected, honoured, based on reciprocal services and mutual affection. The client at Rome was not a servant, he formed part of the family; the patron was not a master, he was almost a father. The man of letters, when he presented himself at Rome for the first time, had no place in the scheme of that very uncultured society. The arrival of the intruder had not been foreseen, and it was not clear how he should be fitted in. Scipio decided the question by including Ennius among his clients.[1] The relations between the poet and his protector profited by the cordiality which usually reigned between client and patron. Ennius was buried in the tomb of the great Scipio; Terence lived on familiar terms with Scipio Æmilianus, and Attius with Brutus Callæcus. The poet repaid in graceful verse and agreeable and instructive conversation what he had received from the great lord's bounty. This reciprocity seemed neither a tyranny in the protector nor a slavery in the client.

Unhappily the Empire brought about great changes in this matter as in many others. The popular *comitia* having been suppressed, the patron had less need of recourse to his clients' good offices. The bonds between them were relaxed, and, with time, there only survived of the former clientage its external

[1] Ennius had inserted in his poem a portrait of the good client. It was asserted that he had been anxious to depict himself.

forms. It scarce consisted of more than the morning *salutatio*, and the distribution of food or money which was its sequel. These are well-known details, but a word must be said, for Martial is constantly recurring to them. About the first or second hour of the day (from 5 to 7 A.M.), the client came to do his homage to his patron. He had, then, if he lived at a distance, to rise before the dawn, after which he arrayed himself in his toga, that is to say, his ceremonial dress. Now the toga is a very uncomfortable garment, especially in summer: Juvenal asserts that in the Italian cities, where people are easygoing, it is never worn by a man till he is dead, that he may be decently buried. Thus clad the client goes on his way through the narrow and slippery streets of the city on the seven hills. He has need to hasten, if his patron be a man of importance, for he risks finding the vestibule crowded and the door blocked; he must then negotiate with the slaves, submit to their rebuffs and shake them by the hand, so as to be placed in the front rank. Finally, his turn arrives after many delays and affronts, and he is admitted to defile before the master, who awaits his visitors in the *atrium*, and to offer him a solemn salute. Then he passes on the steward, who gives him what is called the *sportula*. It was a present which seems to have varied according to the time in value and nature. At this period it consisted of a sum of ten sesterces (about 1s. 8d.). The *sportula* distributed, the drudgery was not yet at an end. The patron takes a pleasure in showing off his crowd of clients to the public and thereby doing himself honour; and so he mounts his litter to go to the Forum, dragging the poor wretches after him, who, their feet in the mire, their togas bespattered, make a passage through the throng and follow him as best they may. It was not that the patron himself enjoyed these morning visits; he often appeared but half-awake and languid after the previous night's orgy, and had difficulty in keeping his eyes open and responding to the salutations offered him; but he laid much stress on this homage, which recalled his ancient importance, and which was probably almost its last vestige. One was sure of giving him a heartfelt pleasure in coming

of a morning to swell the procession of his clients; even great personages were to be seen there, when they had some service to ask of him; prætors and persons of consular rank mingled with the crowd and came to receive the *sportula*.

Nor did Martial miss these morning calls; he had too much need of the rich and powerful to risk displeasing them. It was not, however, the mere *sportula* of itself which attracted him to their houses; it would not have sufficed to keep him alive, and he looked for larger favours from his protectors. The recollection of the ten million sesterces (£80,000) which Virgil, it was said, owed to the generosity of his friends, above all of the Sabine estate which Horace received from Mæcenas, and which made him so happy, never forsook the memories of the Roman poets; it was the dream of all the young men who, on leaving school, threw themselves into literature, and, despite all life's disappointments, never renounced it. Unfortunately there was no longer a Mæcenas. Since the Senecas and the Pisos the race had become extinct. With Vespasian Rome took to a system of middle-class thrift. Juvenal saw well that from the moment the great lords renounced living their magnificent careers, the poets could hardly count any longer on the generosities of old, and, as he knew that poetry could not live on its own resources, he counselled it to implore the Emperor's assistance:

Et spes et ratio studiorum in Cæsare tantum.

Martial had not waited his friend's advice to make a move in this direction. When he saw that none of those on whom he lavished his compliments—neither Regulus, nor Silius Atticus, nor Atedius Melior, nor Arruntius Stella—were as liberal to him as he had hoped, he addressed himself to the Emperor, and, as was somewhat of a habit with him, and he feared his voice might risk being unheard unless he shouted as loudly as the others, he went from the first to extremes, and overwhelmed him with impudent eulogies. He pompously celebrated his victories, which most often were disguised defeats, he complimented him on being 'the restorer of public morals,' although he was well aware that this

author of rigorous laws against the adultery of others had been himself his own niece's lover. He proclaimed him the mildest of men at the moment he had just put to death Rusticus, Senecio, and the son of Helvidius Priscus; vowed that never had there been more freedom when he banished all the professors of philosophy, as a punishment for certain moral reflections of theirs which were inconvenient to him; he called him 'Our Lord and our God,' because he knew the title pleased him; finally, he had the audacity to say that if Jupiter and the Emperor invited him to dinner on the same day, he would go to the Palatine. He made his advances: Domitian persisted in not inviting him. He only received a few of those trivial favours which cost nothing to him who gives, and bring little to him who receives.[1] But he was tenacious and not easily discouraged. He relates how one day when he was complaining to Minerva, the tutelary goddess of Domitian, that the Emperor had refused him some thousands of sesterces which he had begged of him, the goddess answered: 'Fool that thou art, what is not yet given is not necessarily refused'[2]

He still persisted in his faith, never weary of renewing his flatteries and entreaties, harassing the master's favourites and the master himself, and always counting on their finally being heard; when, one morning of the year 96, Domitian was assassinated in his bedchamber by his most confidential servants.

VII

Martial's renown. At Rome. In the provinces. His poverty. His regrets for the country. A return of pride. The death of Domitian. He decides to leave Rome.

At this moment Martial's position appears to us fairly brilliant, though he may seem more dissatisfied than ever. From the first

[1] Notably the *jus trium liberorum*, that is to say, the right to enjoy the privileges of those who had three children alive, and the honorary tribunate which conferred the title of Roman knight. Martial even asserts that by his own influence he had obtained the same favours for others.

[2] vi. 10.

his reputation has not been contested at Rome; he is read, he is admired, and he can say with no exaggeration that he is in every one's hands; there are even wits who know his epigrams by heart and score a success by quoting them appositely at fashionable gatherings. But what made him prouder than anything else was the popularity his works enjoyed in the provinces. Rome was always the great city of which Cicero had already said, 'Life is only to be lived in her light.' She was not quitted without regret, and from afar men constantly kept their eyes fixed upon her. Cæsar, during his campaigns, kept correspondents there, entrusted with the task of keeping him informed in the very depths of Gaul with the jests of the mimes and Cicero's latest good thing. For all the Romans exiled in public functions, legates of legions, governors of provinces, procurators entrusted with the management of princes' estates or the finances of the State, even for simple centurions and prefects of cohorts, it was a stroke of good luck to receive Martial's epigrams, which unfolded to their eyes the most trifling incidents of Roman life. Their pleasure in reading them was shared by the provincial upper class, which no longer talked anything but Latin, and wished to be conversant with all being said or done at Rome. When Martial learnt that his verses were read and repeated, not only in the towns of Gaul, but on the banks of the Danube, and even amidst the fogs of the Rhine and of Britain, he could not help remarking complacently, 'I am something, then!' *nonnihil ergo sumus*![1]

His material position had thus improved; we have positive proofs of it. He had for long occupied a lodging which he rented on the third floor of a house situated on the slopes of the Quirinal, quite near the temple of Flora. In his later years we find him in a small house of his own, for which he asks the Emperor for the concession of a water supply from the aqueduct of the *Aqua Marcia*. All the while he possessed a small field at Nomentum, perhaps held by the favour of the Senecas.[2] To visit it he had to hire a carriage; towards the end he drove there with horses of his

[1] vii. 88.

[2] This, at least, is Friedländer's opinion.

own; which is proof indeed that, whatever he may say, he was then in easier circumstances.

But it does not appear that he was much the happier. His great reputation, in which he sometimes shows such pride, he seems at other moments to take rather lightly. 'This Martial,' he says, 'known to all lands and all peoples, bear him no envy: he is no more famous than the racehorse Andremon.'[1] As to the growth of his fortune, as it never reached the point of sufficing him, he was very poorly satisfied with it; and so till the end he ceased not to complain with the same bitterness. To do him justice, it must be observed that there were within him diverse instincts in internecine conflict. We have so far only seen one side of his character—and not the finer; we must afford a glimpse of the other, if but to form a more favourable opinion before we bid him farewell. He was, no doubt, a man of the world, made for life in the elegant societies of Rome, the one thing in which he delighted; but at moments also the worldly life wearied him, he had fits of yearning for retirement and solitude, he passionately longed for the repose of the fields and the peace of the province. His first thought then was to go and shut himself up in his little house at Nomentum, but he did not there find what he sought; he was not far enough from Rome; he could hear the murmur of the great city, he could see her roofs in the distance; before his eyes the great paved highways and the lines of aqueducts leading towards her did not allow him to forget. Besides, was this really the country? these little gardens with scarce aught in them but some meagre pomegranate and jujube trees, and alleys of box clipped into walls. They produced nothing of what is necessary to life, and all had to be brought to them. One day Martial meets near the Porta Capena his friend Bassus, on a chariot laden with all the rich products of a fertile countryside. There are splendid cabbages to be seen, leeks, lettuces, eggs carefully packed in hay. 'You think perhaps,' says the poet, 'that he was returning from the country to the city. No: he was going from the city to the

[1] x. 9.

country.'[1] This was his own story when he went to Nomentum. And so he preferred to that counterfeit of the country, which was neither town nor country, a regular farm, with granaries where the wheat lies heaped, cellars stocked with great jars to be filled with wine in the autumn, pigsties, and well-populated poultry-yards. This is what he calls, in a charming expression, *rus verum barbarumque*. The great lords and the rich all possess some of these rural estates, the only spots where peace and joy can be found, but they have not leisure to visit them; they are content to spend their money in keeping them up. Those who really enjoy them are not the masters who so rarely go there; it is the farmers who cultivate them and the caretakers. 'Happy farmers,' says Martial, 'happy caretakers!'[2]

Here is a Martial whom we should scarce suspect after reading most of the epigrams. What still less resembles the conception usually formed of him are certain revivals of pride, which, being rare in his works, merit the more to be remarked. However determined he may be to celebrate all who can be useful to him, there are moments when the truth escapes him. In presence of a wealthy puppy who, to humiliate the poet's penury, has bragged of his fortune, he cannot refrain from a sudden burst of wrath: 'What thou art,' he said, 'any man can become. What I am thou shalt never be.'[3] At moments too we are conscious of how the wretched trade he drives weighs upon him; he compares himself to a slave, and finds that the slave is freer than he. He depicts with an accent of profound sorrow the happiness of an independent life: it is the greatest of goods, and that which he has least known; and he shows us that he is not ignorant of how it may be procured. 'You shall be free,' he says to a friend, 'if you renounce a dinner with others, if you are content with a poor glass of Veientine wine, if you have no need, when you are hungry, of being served on plate of gold or silver, if you blush not to wear a toga as shabby as mine, if you can satisfy your appetite with one of those wenches to be got for a couple of asses, if your

[1] iii. 47. [2] x. 30. [3] v. 13.

pride consents to pass through the humble door of your lodging only by bowing your head. Try to have enough strength of soul, enough power over yourself to accept this way of living, and you shall be freer than the king of the Parthians.'[1]

We must suppose, then, that, despite the complacency which led Martial to fulfil all the obligations of his trade as flatterer and suppliant, patience sometimes failed him, and that at moments he felt an idle wish to resist and some desire for escape from his self-imposed servitude. These attempts at revolt must, with age, have grown more frequent; there are professions that ill accord with old age. We feel that in measure as Martial waxes in years, his gaiety pulls a wry face, his humour grows ponderous, his flippancies seem less natural and more jarring. At the same time his physical forces diminish; the necessity of rising before dawn to go and salute the patron seems more and more insupportable to him; there are unending complaints of these morning walks, which cause so much fatigue and bring so little profit. More than once in past years he has dreamed of finding a way of escape. The simplest was to leave Rome and go and bury himself in some provincial town, where life was less expensive. In 88 a journey in Upper Italy momentarily suggested to him the idea of settling at Ravenna, at Aquileia, or at Altinum. 'Ye shall be,' he said to these hospitable towns, 'the resting-place and haven of my old age.'[2] It is probable that the ten years which followed, and which were not always happy, afforded him more than once an occasion to recur to his schemes of retirement; only, as the reasons which he had to be dissatisfied and depressed grew stronger, it no longer sufficed him to take refuge in some Italian town, not far enough from the place he wished to fly, and he resolved to return home to Spain, to his little Bilbilis, whose memory had never forsaken him, and to bid Rome an eternal farewell.

Did the political events in progress at the moment count for anything in his decision? It has been suspected, not without some plausibility. The praises which he had heaped upon Domitian

[1] ii. 53. [2] iv. 25.

might well make him fear to be suspected by the new power.[1] However, he did not at first seem disconcerted. He knew Nerva, who, to escape the imperial tyranny, had affected indifference to politics and interest only in literature; he had flirted with him in little poems, and, as soon as he saw him installed at the Capitol, he prayed Parthenius, who had retained his high position, to present him with his last book of epigrams. Perhaps he had a momentary hope that he would gain by the revolution instead of losing by it, and that Nerva would do for him what Domitian had failed to do. But Trajan's adoption must have made him reflect. No doubt he was aware of the great qualities of the new prince, and he uttered a magnificent eulogy on him: 'Rome, goddess of the nations, queen of the world, whom naught can equal, whom naught can approach, at Trajan's advent trembled with joy. Proud of seeing so many virtues in a single man she cried: "Chiefs of the Parthians, the Thracians, the Sarmatians, Getæ, Britons, I can show you a Cæsar! Approach!"'[2] But neither is he ignorant that with Trajan another tone must be adopted, that the time of the former adulations is past and done with. 'He who reigns over us,' he says, 'is no master, but an Emperor, a senator, the most righteous of all, who from the depths of Styx has brought forth truth with her austere countenance. Beware of addressing such a prince with the language that served you for the others.'[3]

The counsel was good; but Martial no doubt decided that he was not young enough to follow it and change his style. Besides, would not the truth, issuing from a mouth which had so often distorted it, have had an air of deception?

[1] What seems to prove it is that after Nerva's accession he put forth a second edition of his tenth book, in which he probably suppressed the pieces dedicated to Domitian. [2] xii. 8. [3] x. 72.

VIII

The return to Spain. First moments of happiness. Regrets for Rome. The death of Martial.

Martial prepared, then, to return to Spain. He had not to fear, like Statius, who also wished at the end of his life to go back to his native land, that his wife would refuse at the last moment to accompany him: he was unmarried. But what might prevent him from setting forth was that the journey was long and costly, and that he had no money to defray the expense. He had evidently never been very prudent or provident. His friend Quintilian, who was a wise man, blamed him 'for being in too great a hurry to live'; to which Martial gaily retorted that one can never hasten enough, when one has no intention of leaving a fortune to one's heirs, and that, for himself alone, he could always scrape together a living.[1] He had not, then, economised, and found himself much embarrassed when this great expense—which he had not foreseen—unexpectedly occurred. Happily a generous protector, the younger Pliny, came to his aid and gave him the funds he lacked. It was one way of paying for the eulogies he had received from him. Pliny makes no secret of this, and he openly censures those who do not act as he. 'It is,' he says, 'since we have ceased to merit the praise, that we have lost the habit of being grateful for it.'

On his return to Bilbilis Martial was, at first, quite happy. His joy overflows in a little piece he sends to Juvenal. He has a malicious delight in figuring to himself his friend, of a morning, with his heavy toga, breathless with running through the streets of Rome, in order to reach his patron's house before he has gone out; whilst he in his little town is enjoying a profound slumber, and in order to make up the arrears caused by thirty-four years of sitting up late, lies in bed till the third hour of the day (9 A.M.). When he rises he is under no obligation to don his toga; from the

[1] ii. 90.

chair beside the bed he takes the first garment that comes to hand and throws it on his back; then he approaches the fireplace where burn, not as at Rome a few thin and scanty billets, but oaken logs brought from the adjacent forest, which like a crown encircle the farmwife's pots. He warms himself there till they come to seek him to go hunting. 'Behold,' he says, 'how I love to live! Behold how I wish to die.'[1]

But this happiness did not last; it could not last. Martial had returned to his country as poor as he left it. Now at Bilbilis as at Rome it was necessary to live. Existence, no doubt, was easier there, but nowhere can one live on nothing, and to procure necessities Martial had but one trade: he had to go on doing what till now he had done so far—to seek in the little town what he had not found in Rome, useful protectors to shelter him from want. He discovered some, old friends no doubt, who, from the first, seem well-disposed to him. These were, more especially, Terentius Priscus, who, like him, had returned from Rome, and whom he calls his Mæcenas; Ælianus, who made him a present of one of those chariots called *covinnus*, that is a light carriage with two seats, which one could drive oneself, chatting freely with a friend without any fear of a coachman's eavesdropping; Marcella, finally, a wealthy and distinguished woman, whom Martial praises by saying that she exactly resembles a Roman woman of Rome, and that when he converses with her, he imagines himself transported to the Palatine or the Capitol. She was a generous patroness,[2] and gave him a garden of which he has afforded us a very agreeable description: 'This little grove, these fountains, this arbour shaded by a vine, this brook whose living waters meander at their fancy, these rosebushes, lovely as those of Pæstum, which bloom twice a year, these vegetables, green in January, which never freeze, these streams in which the domesticated eel swims in captivity, this white tower peopled by doves as white as she—I owe them all to Marcella: 'tis she, 'tis Marcella who has endowed me with this little empire. Did Nausicaa come to offer me the gardens of

[1] xii. 18. [2] Not a wife, as has been conjectured.

Alcinous her father, I should not hesitate to tell her: "I prefer to keep my own."'[1]

Unfortunately these favours imposed duties upon him, and these duties speedily came to be chains. He was not, then, so free as he desired to be, and his departure from Rome had not sufficed for total escape from the servitude of clientage. Who knows? as Roman usages were widely diffused in the provinces, it may be that certain Bilbilis patrons, to be in the fashion of the capital, had taken it into their heads to exact the morning visit from their dependants. 'I love repose, I cannot forgo my sleep,' cries Martial; 'I left Rome because I did not find it there. If I am to sleep no better at Bilbilis, I will return to Rome.' He was thus forced to recognise, to his great regret, that he had not gained much by quitting the city; he was not long in seeing that he had lost a great deal. After the first days, which he had spent in idleness, he wished to set to work again. His friends demanded new epigrams of him. When he tried to satisfy them, he perceived he had no longer the same ardour in his work, nor the same ease, and that inspiration failed him. It is hard to see how things could have been otherwise. His epigrams, we have seen, are but the reflection of Roman life. At Rome the themes of his little poems popped up, so to speak, at every step, without his having to take the trouble to look for them; outside Rome he had nothing more to say. It is clear, when we read the preface to his twelfth book, that he was conscious of it. 'If there be aught agreeable in my works,' he says to his friend Terentius Priscus, 'it is the reader who has dictated it to me.[2] Here I no longer find what elsewhere supplied me with piquant matter for my verses—the libraries, the theatres, the receptions, which afforded so much pleasure that we did not perceive how useful they were to us; all these precious advantages, to which I was wrong to take a distaste when I could enjoy them, I can no longer dispense with now that I have lost them.'

[1] xii. 31.

[2] La Bruyère's saying can be recognised: 'I return to the public what it has given to me.'

To those regrets for the great city was soon joined some of the boredom incidental to small country towns. He had thought the reputation he had won would ensure him a good reception in his native place, and that for Bilbilis he would be what Catullus was for Verona; but if there were many of his compatriots who were proud of his glory, many were jealous of it. Scarce had he arrived, than he was conscious of the pettinesses of the provincial spirit, the ridiculous gossip, the obscure rivalries, the mean envies, of which he says that 'they make the gorge rise in reasonable men.' He had to suffer much from these bickerings which he had not looked for. And so when, about this time, he sends off to Rome his twelfth book, which was to be the last,[1] with a versified dedication to commend it to his friends, his imagination takes the road with it, he delights in bearing it company; he visits the library of the temple of Apollo, where his book is to take its place beside its elders; he looks again upon the house of Stella where he has been such a frequent visitor, with that beautiful garden which he has described, and that marvellous fountain, 'in which the Muses have so often quenched their thirst.' He seems so happy in this imaginary journey, that one asks if he did not think of soon making it in reality, and suspects that at that moment, at the bottom of his heart, he dreamt of returning to die at Rome.

He had not time for that. In a letter which must date from the year 101 or 102, Pliny writes to one of his friends: 'I have just learnt of Martial's death, and the news has much afflicted me. He was a man of wit, piquant and mordant, who mixed salt and honey in his verses, and, no less, candour.' This appreciation, slightly singular at first sight, is just. Although Martial's epigrams are often cruel, there none the less reigns throughout them all an air of good-humour which tempers their bitterness. He is not one of those eternal scoffers who in diverting irritate us, and with whom we end by losing our temper. We say when we

[1] Books xiii. and xiv. which terminate the works in the editions of Martial had been written and published a long time before.

have read him that, after all, this man, with all his malice, was not a bad fellow. In concluding his letter Pliny asks himself 'are the works of Martial to be immortal?' He hopes they will be so, for Martial has written his eulogy, and this eulogy can only survive with the work which contains it. But he dares not count on it; we can see that this grave man thinks that pieces of such airiness have small chance of living.[1] Contemporaries are very subject to self-deception, when they meddle with anticipations of the judgments posterity is to pass upon them, and I suppose we should be much astonished were we told who are the authors of our own day who will be remembered in a century's time. Martial, for his part, has never been forgotten. Each epoch has appropriated to itself what there is in his work of universal truth. To-day we seek above all for what is peculiar to the society of his time, and we are right, for it is he who familiarises us with it in its smallest details and renders it for us a living thing.

[1] *Ep.* iii. 21. I quote Melmoth's translation of Martial's eulogy of Pliny:

> Go, wanton Muse, but go with care,
> Nor meet, ill-timed, my Pliny's ear;
> He, by sage Minerva taught,
> Gives the day to studious thought,
> And plans that eloquence divine
> Which shall to future ages shine,
> And rival, wondrous Tully! thine.
> Then, cautious, watch the vacant hour
> When Bacchus reigns in all his pow'r,
> When, crown'd with rosy chaplets gay,
> E'en rigid Catos read my lay.
>
> *Translator's note.*

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